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## Abstract. Thomas Matthew Rodger Bishops in parliament: the Lords Spiritual, c. 1903-1974

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Twenty-six Anglican bishops and archbishops – the ‘Lords Spiritual’ – are members of the House of Lords by right of their position within the established Church of England. They retain a place of symbolic and practical significance in parliament despite the widespread ‘secularisation’ of British (especially English) society and the ‘institutional marginalisation’ of the Church from the state during the twentieth century.

How has the Church of England’s direct influence in parliament survived, and what purpose has it served? In answering these questions, new perspectives are given on the reciprocal influence of political and religious debates, the role of the House of Lords, the dynamics of ‘secularisation’, and the function of the religious establishment. Study of the Lords Spiritual acts as an ‘institutional’ corrective to the ‘social’ and ‘cultural’ approaches which, since the late 1950s, have come to characterise studies of the relationship between church and state.

Between c. 1903 and 1974, the role of the Lords Spiritual changed significantly. While once they claimed a role in the balance of constitutional ‘estates’, they came to place themselves within the chamber’s balance of expertise. Though at times the bishops attained temporary political importance, their conduct responded to ecclesiastical influences – chiefly, the perception of the Church’s and Christianity’s declining place in national life. In their efforts to influence parliamentary debates, they were constrained by the need to relate to the prevailing political and parliamentary discourses. This entailed compromises which became greater as the identities of Church and state diverged, and as social practices departed from traditional Christian standards.

DURHAM UNIVERSITY, DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY

# Bishops in parliament

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The Lords Spiritual, c. 1903-1974

**Thomas Matthew Rodger**

Submitted in fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy

2017

For Elise

## Acknowledgements

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In completing this thesis, I have had the good fortune to be able to call upon the advice and assistance of a great many colleagues, friends, and members of my family. These acknowledgements are an indication of my debts owed to others, though they are by no means exhaustive.

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## Table of contents

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Abbreviations .....	6
List of figures .....	7
Copyright declaration.....	8

<b>Introduction</b> The ‘institutional marginalisation’ of the established Church .....	9
---	---

### **Part 1**

<b>1</b> The Lords Spiritual, c. 1903-1920 .....	37
<b>2</b> Prelates, peers, and parties: the parliamentary bishops and the 1911 constitutional crisis .....	72

### **Part 2**

<b>3.</b> The Lords Spiritual, c. 1920-1945 .....	99
<b>4.</b> Declining significance: ecclesiastical and parliamentary reform in the inter-war period.....	129
4.1 Ecclesiastical reform .....	129
4.2 House of Lords reform .....	144
<b>5.</b> Competing visions of the Church establishment in the Lords .....	158
5.1 Cosmo Lang.....	161
5.2 Cyril Garbett.....	177
5.3 Hensley Henson and Bertram Pollock.....	183

### **Part 3**

<b>6.</b> The Lords Spiritual, c. 1945-1974 .....	194
<b>7.</b> The ‘secular society’ and the Church’s place in national debate .....	235
<b>8.</b> The Lords Spiritual and ‘permissive’ legislation .....	263

<b>Conclusion</b> Bishops in parliament .....	293
---	-----

<b>Appendices</b>	
A. Reproduction of Robert Beloe’s categorisation of episcopal contributions to House of Lords debates, 1957-1967.....	306
B. Reproduction of Gavin Drewry’s and Jenny Brock’s categorisation of episcopal contributions to House of Lords debates, 1960-1969 ..	307
C. Classifications used by the present study to categorise episcopal contributions to House of Lords debates, 1903-1974.....	308

<b>Bibliography</b> .....	311
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## Abbreviations

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ALRA	Abortion Law Reform Association
Bel.	Robert Beloe papers
BHP	Bishop Leslie Hunter papers
BM	Minute books of the Bishops' Meetings
BP	Bishop George Bell papers
Bry.	Viscount Bryce papers
BSR	Board for Social Responsibility/Papers of the Board for Social Responsibility
CAB	Cabinet Office records
CDI	Church Institution/Church Defence Institution
CFR	Papers of the Council on Foreign Relations
CHAR	Sir Winston Churchill papers
COPEC	Conference on Politics, Economics and Citizenship
CP	Viscount Cecil of Chelwood papers
Cur.	Marquess Curzon of Kedleston papers
DP	Archbishop Randall Davidson papers
EP	Bishop Gerald Ellison papers
FO	Foreign Office records
FP	Archbishop Geoffrey Fisher papers
GP	Archbishop Cyril Garbett papers
Ho.	Sir Samuel Hoare papers on Indian affairs
HP	Bishop Hensley Henson papers
IOR	India Office records and private papers
LP	Archbishop Cosmo Lang papers
LQP	Lord Quickswood papers
MWC	Moral Welfare Council
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organisation
PCCs	Parochial Church Councils
RP	Archbishop Michael Ramsey papers
Selb. 2	2 <sup>nd</sup> Earl of Selborne papers
Selb. 3	3 <sup>rd</sup> Earl of Selborne papers
SIC	Social and Industrial Council
UDI	Unilateral Declaration of Independence
UN	United Nations
WLP	Walter Long papers



## List of figures

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- Figure 1 (p. 43)     *Total episcopal contributions to House of Lords debates, parliamentary sessions 1904 to 1913*
- Figure 2 (p. 198)     *Total episcopal contributions to House of Lords debates, parliamentary sessions 1945 to 1958*
- Figure 3 (p. 200)     *Contributions to House of Lords debates by the archbishops of Canterbury, parliamentary sessions 1945 to 1974*
- Figure 4 (p. 201)     *Total episcopal contributions to House of Lords debates, parliamentary sessions 1956 to 1969*

## Copyright declaration

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## Introduction. The ‘institutional marginalisation’ of the established Church

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***B**E IT ENACTED by the Queen's most Excellent Majesty, by and with the advice and consent of the Lords Spiritual and Temporal, and Commons, in this present Parliament assembled, and by the authority of the same, as follows : –*

This phrase prefaces almost every act of the British parliament.<sup>1</sup> It is a passage so commonplace as to assume the character of a formality or a linguistic embellishment. However, though the formulation is routine, it is of significant historical consequence. In affirming that legislative authority is derived from the ‘Lords Spiritual’<sup>2</sup> as well as the Crown, the peerage, and the Commons, it attests to the continuing institutional significance of the established Church of England.<sup>3</sup> The clerical ‘estate of the realm’ retains a place of symbolic and practical influence in the conduct of parliamentary business. That this remains the case despite the wide-ranging desacralisation of British society during the twentieth century presents a paradox – the representation of a single church, ministering to just one of the constituent nations of the United Kingdom, continues to be embedded in the parliament of an apparently ‘secular’, religiously plural society. The paradox is still greater: in recent discussions of changes in the composition of the House of Lords,

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<sup>1</sup> The exceptions being those acts which have passed under the terms of the Parliament Acts of 1911 and 1949 – that is to say, without the consent of the House of Lords. This applies to just seven acts, the most recent being the Hunting Act (2004).

<sup>2</sup> For ease of expression, this thesis will on occasion refer to the ‘Lords Spiritual’ – the two archbishops and twenty-four bishops of the Church of England who sit in the House of Lords – simply as ‘the parliamentary bishops’, or variations thereupon.

<sup>3</sup> Throughout this thesis, the term ‘established Church’ refers to the Church of England. The Church of Scotland always had a different institutional relationship to the state, and was effectively disestablished by mutual consent in 1921 by the Church of Scotland Act.

the presence of the Lords Spiritual has been almost entirely absent as an issue in the reform agenda.<sup>4</sup>

The historical significance of this paradox has not been adequately considered. The turn in the practice of ecclesiastical history from the late 1950s away from an institutional focus, and towards social and cultural understandings<sup>5</sup> has diverted attention away from the Church's role in the House of Lords. The secularisation debate in particular, which has dominated the historiography of religion in modern Britain, has been marked by anti-institutionalism. Early intellectual discussion of 'secularisation' was heavily influenced by 'history from below' and by class analysis, with the effect that interest in 'the Church' as an institution was confined to its apparent function as an instrument of social manipulation and control. Indeed, Ted Wickham's landmark 1958 study of the secularisation process in Sheffield, *Church and people in an industrial city*, defined itself by its opposition to narrow institutional understandings of the Church's development. Ecclesiastical history had been conducted as if the Church was 'abstracted from society'; this was, in itself, 'a disturbing symptom of the preoccupation of the Church with her own life and work'.<sup>6</sup>

More recent revisionist accounts have continued to eschew institutional understandings, taking a cultural and 'linguistic' turn. Callum Brown's influential statement of the case, *The death of Christian Britain*, for example, is concerned with subjective religious experiences and practices, and their role in the formation of the

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<sup>4</sup> Royal Commission on the reform of the House of Lords, *A House for the future* (London, 2000), ch. 15.

<sup>5</sup> See Sarah Foot, 'Has ecclesiastical history lost the plot?', *Studies in Church history* 49 (2013), pp. 1-25.

<sup>6</sup> E.R. Wickham, *Church and people in an industrial city* (London, 1957), p. 12. See also, Jeremy Morris, 'Secularization and religious experience: arguments in the historiography of modern British religion', *Historical journal* 55 (2012), pp. 198-200.

identities of individuals.<sup>7</sup> Much has been revealed about the persistence of popular Christian belief in this way. However, it has also had the unintentional effect of further marginalising interest in the relationship between religious organisations and political processes. Brown's arguments in particular tend to run parallel to, but rarely intersect with, the currents of mainstream political and social dynamics.<sup>8</sup> From the perspective of social and cultural historians, vestiges of the Church of England's institutional political influence such as the Lords Spiritual are to be discounted as anomalies, though perhaps curious. Even Simon Green, who acknowledges that a social history of religion must also be political, considers the persistence of the Church's presence in institutions of governance only so far as it can be regarded as symptomatic of 'undisciplined' – that is to say, unevenly 'secularised' (or at least observationally and doctrinally inconsistent) – public religious sentiment.<sup>9</sup>

The lack of attention to the relationship between religion and politics in twentieth-century Britain has begun to be redressed in recent years, perhaps most prolifically in respect to rhetoric and ideology.<sup>10</sup> Consideration has also been given to the continuing political significance of ecclesiastical issues<sup>11</sup> and, particularly

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<sup>7</sup> Callum Brown, *The death of Christian Britain: understanding secularisation, 1800-2000* (London, 2000). See also, Sarah Williams, *Religious belief and popular culture in Southwark, c. 1880-1939* (Oxford, 1999).

<sup>8</sup> Jeremy Morris, 'The strange death of Christian Britain: another look at the secularization debate', *Historical journal* 46 (2003), pp. 968-71.

<sup>9</sup> S.J.D. Green, *The passing of protestant England: secularisation and social change, c. 1920-1960* (Cambridge, 2011), pp. 10-11, 81-91.

<sup>10</sup> Maurice Cowling, *Religion and public doctrine in modern England* (Cambridge, 1980-2004); Matthew Grimley, *Citizenship, community, and the Church of England: liberal Anglican theories of the state between the wars* (Oxford, 2004); Philip Williamson, 'The doctrinal politics of Stanley Baldwin', in M. Bentley (ed.), *Public and private doctrine: essays in British history presented to Maurice Cowling* (Cambridge, 1993), pp. 181-208; Philip Williamson, *Stanley Baldwin: conservative leadership and national values* (Cambridge, 1999).

<sup>11</sup> G.I.T. Machin, *Politics and the churches in Great Britain, 1869-1921* (Oxford, 1987); John Maiden, *National religion and the prayer book controversy, 1927-1928* (Woodbridge, 2009); John Maiden, 'Discipline and comprehensiveness: the Church of England and prayer book revision', *Studies in Church history* 43 (2007), pp. 377-87; John Maiden and Peter Webster, 'Parliament, the Church of England and the last gasp of political Protestantism, 1963-4', *Parliamentary history* 32 (2013), pp. 361-77.

interestingly, to the Church's role in colonial governance and decolonisation.<sup>12</sup> A handful of studies have considered the Church's role in the parliamentary process, particularly in respect to the 'permissive' legislation of the 1960s. Collectively, these works point towards the Church's continuing political and social influence in the definition of social relations.<sup>13</sup>

Useful as these studies are, they have been limited in scope. The established Church's relationship towards, and engagement with, British political institutions in the twentieth century remains under-explored. There has, as yet, been no substantive answer to Jeremy Morris' 2004 call for re-consideration of the assumed 'institutional marginalisation' of the Church from the structures of government over the twentieth century.<sup>14</sup>

It is in responding to these issues that study of the Lords Spiritual is particularly useful. These archbishops and bishops have been situated at the juncture between the established Church, British politics, and the state, occupying a place of unique ecclesiastical and political significance, able to exert an influence – at times, powerfully – on the work of parliament. Indeed, they can rightly claim to be the

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<sup>12</sup> John Fisher, 'The Church of England and British policy towards the Assyrians, 1914-1955', in Keith Robbins and John Fisher (eds.), *Religion and diplomacy: religion and British foreign policy, 1815 to 1941* (Dordrecht, 2010), pp. 225-50; Laura Robson, 'Church, state, and the Holy Land: British protestant approaches to imperial policy in Palestine, 1917-1948', *Journal of imperial and commonwealth history* 39 (2011), pp. 457-77; Sarah Stockwell, "'Splendidly leading the way"? Archbishop Fisher and decolonisation in British colonial Africa', *Journal of imperial and commonwealth history* 36 (2008), pp. 545-64; Sarah Stockwell, "'Improper and even unconstitutional": the involvement of the Church of England in the politics of the end of empire in Cyprus', in Melanie Barber and Stephen Taylor, with Gabriel Sewell (eds.), *From the Reformation to the permissive society: a miscellany in celebration of the 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Lambeth Palace Library* (Woodbridge, 2010), pp. 584-656.

<sup>13</sup> Matthew Grimley, 'Law, morality and secularisation: the Church of England and the Wolfenden Report', *Journal of ecclesiastical history* 60 (2009), pp. 725-41; Timothy Jones, 'Moral welfare and social well-being: the Church of England and the emergence of modern homosexuality', in Lucy Delap and Sue Morgan (eds.), *Men, masculinities and religious change in twentieth century Britain* (Basingstoke, 2013), pp. 197-217; Jane Lewis and Patrick Wallis, 'Fault, breakdown, and the Church of England's involvement in the 1969 divorce reform', *Twentieth-century British history* 11 (2000), pp. 308-32.

<sup>14</sup> Jeremy Morris, 'Strange death', pp. 972-3. Morris went some way to addressing these issues in *Religion and urban change, Croydon, 1840-1914* (Woodbridge, 1991).

oldest continuous component of the chamber. The institution of the Lords Spiritual dates from at least the post-Norman *Curia Regis*, though it has been suggested that its origins extend from the Anglo-Saxon Witenagemot.<sup>15</sup> The Lords Spiritual's long continuity in the House has been broken only briefly, by the ruptures and religious turmoil of the English Civil War.<sup>16</sup> So crucial was the presence of representatives of the Church in early assemblies that they on occasion outnumbered the peers, at least until the Dissolution of the monasteries in the 1530s removed the abbots. Even then, the Lords Spiritual continued for a significant period to constitute one-third of the chamber's membership.<sup>17</sup>

Of course, since the Dissolution, the balance of Lords Spiritual and Temporal has altered greatly. The modern parliamentary representation of bishops has been fixed by statute at twenty-six since the Bishopric of Manchester Act (1847), which heralded an era of proliferation of dioceses in the Church of England.<sup>18</sup> It also established the practice whereby the holders of the five most prestigious dioceses – the ‘great sees’ of Canterbury, York, London, Durham, and Winchester – receive their Writ of Summons on an *ex officio* basis. The remaining 21 parliamentary seats are allocated on the basis of the length of tenure in the diocesan episcopate of the Church of England.<sup>19</sup> As such, of the forty-one English diocesan bishops, sixteen at any one time are unable to assume a place in the House. By the end of the twentieth

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<sup>15</sup> Luke Owen Pike, *A constitutional history of the House of Lords from original sources* (London, 1894), pp. 151-3.

<sup>16</sup> The Lords Spiritual were removed by the Clergy Act of 1642. After the restoration of the monarchy, the Lords Spiritual were reinstated under the Clergy Act of 1661. See Philip Laundy, ‘Parliament and the Church’, *Parliamentary affairs* 12 (1958), p. 453.

<sup>17</sup> Pike, *Constitutional history*, pp. 165-6.

<sup>18</sup> Section 2 of 10 and 11 Vict. c 108. All subsequent acts creating bishoprics have reaffirmed the limitation on the bishops' parliament seats.

<sup>19</sup> The procedure for appointing Lords Spiritual was modified temporarily in March 2015 by the Lords Spiritual (Women) Act. For ten years after the Act came into force, vacancies among the Lords Spiritual must be filled in the first place by eligible woman. The Act does not apply to the sees of Canterbury, York, London, Durham or Winchester. See Charley Coleman and Eren Waitzman, ‘Lords Spiritual (Women) Bill (HL Bill 87 of 2014-15)’, *House of Lords Library note*, LLN 2015/002.

century, the bishops constituted barely three *per cent* of the membership of the chamber.<sup>20</sup>

In a modern context, the Anglican bishops can hardly be thought to constitute a substantial parliamentary presence. However, their practical and symbolic influence in the House far exceeds their numerical weight. Though over their long tenure the bishops have at various times claimed a place amongst the ‘Peers of the Realm’, in reality they occupy a distinct position in parliament.<sup>21</sup> According to the Standing Orders of the House, the Lords Spiritual are not technically ‘peers’, but rather ‘Lords of Parliament’.<sup>22</sup> The peers receive their Writ of Summons in their own right, entitled to attend the House for life; the Lords Spiritual are summoned only so long as they remain in the Anglican diocesan episcopate.<sup>23</sup> The uniqueness of the bishops’ position is most overtly manifested through their attendance in the House in clerical dress – cassocks, rochets, and lawn sleeves.<sup>24</sup> They also have a special place in the House’s ceremonial and in the conduct of its business. On their introduction, Lords Spiritual are not accompanied by peers, but by episcopal colleagues.<sup>25</sup> The inductee is conducted through the House to the uniquely embellished benches

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<sup>20</sup> Michael L. Nash, ‘The “leaven in the lump” bishops in the House of Lords’, *Contemporary review* 274 (1999), pp. 196-9.

<sup>21</sup> Anna Harlow, Frank Cranmer, and Norman Doe, ‘Bishops in the House of Lords: a critical analysis’, *Public Law* 3 (2008), pp. 490-509; Pike, *A constitutional history*, pp. 151-68; Matthew Purvis, ‘House of Lords: religious representation’, *House of Lords Library note*, LLN 2011/036.

<sup>22</sup> ‘The Standing Orders of the House of Lords relating to public business’, HL Paper 3 (London, 2016), p. 8.

<sup>23</sup> It has become a convention that archbishops are made life peers on resigning their see. Former archbishops of Canterbury made life peers: Barons Fisher of Lambeth, Ramsey of Canterbury, Coggan of Canterbury and of Sissinghurst, Runcie of Cuddesdon, Carey of Clifton, Williams of Oystermouth.

Former archbishops of York made life peers: Baron Blanch of Bishopthorpe, Habgood of Calverton, Hope of Thornes.

<sup>24</sup> Mervyn Stockwood, Bishop of Southwark (1959-1980), raised ‘lordly eyebrows’ by attending the House on one occasion in a lounge suit. See Ellison to Ramsey, 7 May 1973, RP 254/110-1.

<sup>25</sup> See Glenn Dymond, ‘Ceremonial in the House of Lords’, *House of Lords Library note*, LNN 2010/007, pp. 18-19; Philippa Tudor, ‘The ceremony of the introduction of bishops to the House of Lords’, *Parliamentary history* 21 (2002), pp. 241-5.



reserved for the Lords Spiritual.<sup>26</sup> The symbolism of the ‘bishops’ benches’ is important. Situated between the government’s front bench and the throne, they are a tangible reminder of legislators’ responsibilities beyond the temporal, as well as the supremacy of the monarch. The symbolic recalling of the nation’s Christian foundations is reaffirmed each sitting day as, except in rare circumstances, a member of the bishops’ bench opens the proceedings of the House with prayer.<sup>27</sup>

Of course, there is much about the role of the Lords Spiritual which might be regarded as simply traditional and ceremonial. After all, no bishop has held government office since at least 1711.<sup>28</sup> Even so, the Lords Spiritual remain an integral component in the effective functioning of the upper chamber. They are uniquely distinguished as the only members of either of the Houses of parliament whose qualifying credentials are based solely on their role within a particular church or faith.<sup>29</sup> Only diocesan bishops of the Church of England – these included the bishops in the principality of Wales until its dioceses were disestablished in 1920 – are able to be members of the House as Lords Spiritual. Although clerics of the established Church of Scotland sat in the parliament of Scotland until 1689, with the abolition of that parliament by the Acts of Union in 1707, the Church – now a fully

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<sup>26</sup> Although peers can sit on these benches if unoccupied by bishops, only Lords Spiritual are permitted to address the House from them. Lord Birkenhead (F.E. Smith) was once cried down when making a brief speech from the bishops’ benches, later receiving a wry note of congratulation from the Lord Chancellor for his apparent induction into the episcopate: Cyril Garbett, *Church and state in England* (London, 1950), p. 124.

<sup>27</sup> Before the establishment of the Supreme Court of the United Kingdom in 2009, this practice applied to the sittings of the Law Lords as well.

<sup>28</sup> According to Laundy, John Robinson, Bishop of Bristol, was the last bishop to hold political office as Lord Privy Seal in 1711. Philip Bromhead states the last episcopal holder of a major political office to have been John Williams, who, a month after being appointed Lord Keeper of the Great Seal in July 1621, was made Bishop of Lincoln. It is also worth considering that the Archbishop of Canterbury was also a nominal member of the Cabinet during its formation in the eighteenth century. P.A. Bromhead, ‘The bishops and the House of Lords’, *Church quarterly review* 158 (1957), p. 492; Laundy, ‘Parliament and the Church’, p. 447.

<sup>29</sup> In no other contemporary democratic country are seats reserved in the legislature for representatives of an established religion. For provocative comment on the apparent injustice of the representation of Anglican bishops alone, see Iain McLean, *What’s wrong with the British constitution* (Oxford, 2010), pp. 287-97.

Presbyterian church – did not receive representation in the House of Lords.

Archbishops and bishops of the (‘Anglican’) Church of Ireland similarly sat in the Irish House of Lords, and at the point of the union with Great Britain in 1801 – in this case, an ecclesiastical as well as political union – its bishops became entitled to a place in the British House of Lords. However, as with the Welsh bishops, at the point of disestablishment in 1871, the archbishops and bishops of the Church of Ireland ceased to be qualified for membership of the House of Lords.

Never during the twentieth century did the Church of England publicly oppose the representation of other churches – established or not – or, in more recent times, other faiths, in the House of Lords. However, it is commonly recognised that the practical impediments to admitting such persons as Lords Spiritual are insuperable. Catholic canon law, for instance, forbids clergy from holding secular office.<sup>30</sup> On the other hand, the most senior post of Church of Scotland, the moderator, is elected each year, making its incumbent’s selection for admission to the House of Lords fraught; the moderator’s membership of the House would be so short as to be constitutionally anomalous and politically awkward. Moreover, as successive moderators would have little opportunity to cultivate influence in the chamber, their parliamentary interventions would likely be ineffectual.

That is not to suggest that leaders of other churches and faiths have not been admitted to the House of Lords. Since at least the mid-1960s, at least some consideration has been given to religious criteria in appointing new peers. A notable example was Donald Soper, Methodist minister and former President of the Methodist Conference. Soper was made a baron by Harold Wilson’s government in

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<sup>30</sup> Although on matters of specific moral interest, there is clear organisation among Catholic laymen in the House, and often an unofficial spokesman has emerged. See chapter 8.

1965,<sup>31</sup> and was even given special permission to deliver speeches in the House dressed in his cassock.<sup>32</sup> His capacity to speak on behalf of specific religious and denominational interests was publicly acknowledged.<sup>33</sup> And yet, as a life peer, his elevation to the peerage was a consequence, not of his association with any particular religious group, but of his personal distinction.<sup>34</sup>

Only the diocesan bishops of the Church of England can obtain admittance to the House of Lords explicitly by virtue of their role within a religious society. Yet they by no means consider their responsibilities as limited to just the boundaries of the Church of England, or even to England itself. In their submission to the 2011 Parliamentary Joint Committee on the government's draft House of Lords reform bill and White Paper, the archbishops of Canterbury and York noted the established Church's enduring commitment 'to the whole community, to people of all faiths and none'. It spoke to the Church's perception of its 'national' role. The peculiar set of historical circumstances in which the English religious establishment has developed, it was suggested, had given the Church of England a sense of 'mission' which extended far beyond its own ministerial, or even geographical, boundaries. Despite being drawn from the episcopate of the Church of England, the Lords Spiritual have long claimed the ability to speak on behalf of religious interests across the United Kingdom, in Scotland, in Wales, and in Northern Ireland as well as in England.

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<sup>31</sup> Other significant contemporary appointments of religious leaders as life peers included George Macleod, minister of the Church of Scotland, and Reginald Sorensen, Unitarian minister and Labour MP. In 1988, the Chief Rabbi Immanuel Jakobovits was admitted to the House of Lords as a life peer. His successor, Jonathan Sacks, was afforded the same honour in 2009, though the present Chief Rabbi, Ephraim Mirvis, has not been elevated to the peerage as yet.

<sup>32</sup> Alan Wilkinson, 'Soper, Donald Oliver (1903-1998)', ODNB.

<sup>33</sup> Soper was, for example, asked by the BBC in planning a radio discussion on House of Lords reform for an interview concerning the role of the Lords Spiritual and, implicitly, religious representation in the House: Gill to Ellison, 23 Nov. 1976, EP 0/1/1/72/96.

<sup>34</sup> The Archbishop Fisher's Lay Secretary, Robert Beloe, supposed that party-political calculations had also factored into Soper's appointment. Beloe memo., 15 Nov. 1967, RP 115/308-10.

The submission went on to suggest that the presence and influence of Anglican bishops in parliament was essential not just for the preservation of the nation's constitutional fabric, but also as an affirmation of the essential spiritual values which bound communities together and which underpinned the institutions of the state. In such a formulation, the Lords Spiritual did not simply represent a particular religious community, but the essential religious influences on civic life.

The Lords Spiritual ... fulfil an important role in the legislature as an enduring voice for the concerns of people of all faiths, especially at a time of increasingly secularising currents in our public institutions and services.<sup>35</sup>

This 'enduring voice' has in recent years increased in volume, and indeed drawn considerable public and political attention. Much has been made of the Church's response to the politics and rhetoric of 'austerity' – in some ways, as the political Left has struggled to respond to the economic discourse, the Lords Spiritual have assumed a role as an unofficial 'Opposition'. When the Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition government attempted to cap welfare payments in 2012, it was the Bishop of Ripon and Leeds, John Packer, who introduced an amendment exempting child benefit from the calculation, a change ministers claimed would make the bill 'meaningless'.<sup>36</sup> While such interventions raised the hackles of Conservative ministers,<sup>37</sup> the bishops have come under much more public condemnation for their opposition to some of that government's social programme, notably the introduction of same-sex marriage.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> *A submission from the archbishops of Canterbury and York to the parliamentary joint committee on the government's draft bill and White Paper*, General Synod misc. paper 1004 (Oct. 2011), p. 7.

<sup>36</sup> *HL Deb.* 734, cc. 833-5, 856-9, 23 Jan. 2012.

<sup>37</sup> *Mail online*, 'Iain Duncan Smith blasts bishops meddling in politics', 19 Feb. 2015.

<sup>38</sup> Archbishop of Canterbury and the bishops of Birmingham, Bristol, Chester, Coventry, Exeter, Hereford, London, and Winchester voted in favour of Lord Dear's wrecking amendment, which would have denied the Marriage (same sex couples) Bill a second reading. The amendment was lost 390 to 148. *HL Deb.* 745, cc. 1109-13, 4 Jun. 2013.

It is worth pausing to consider again the incongruity – frankly, the irrationality – of such a situation. The contemporary Lords Spiritual retain a place of influence in a central institution of political debate and policy formation. They continue to have ready access to the crucial actors of national political life – the sovereign, Cabinet ministers, and senior civil servants – through their involvement in the House of Lords, their access to the ‘Westminster village’, and, in the cases of the archbishops of Canterbury and York, and the Bishop of London, through their place among the privy councillors. This is the case despite significant political, social, and religious change during the twentieth century – the demographic decline of institutional Christian religion and growth of religious pluralism, the disestablishment of other established churches in the United Kingdom, the desacralisation of social practice and shifting concerns of political and parliamentary debate, indeed the changing sense of the ‘nation’ and the dynamics between its constituent constitutional parts. How is it that, despite all this, the presence of the Lords Spiritual in the legislature has persisted? What does it mean for the religious establishment, and indeed for the House of Lords, that it has?

Stemming from these fundamental issues, further questions follow. What is the nature of the bishops’ influence in the House? How do they situate themselves within the parliamentary discourse? What is the character of the relationships they have with the peers and political party organisations, with the Church of England and with other churches, and with English and British society? What have the Lords Spiritual considered their role to be, and what influences have acted upon it? What has their influence been on British politics and government policy?

Answering these questions offers a new understanding of the changing relationship between the Church of England and British politics and society during

the twentieth century. In one sense, they provide insights into parliamentary processes. Despite the decline in its power since 1911, the House of Lords is not as politically inconsequential as is often assumed. The Church – in part through the representation of its archbishops and bishops in the House of Lords – has had a direct influence on policy-making and legislation, and on currents of political debate. In studying the Lords Spiritual, the role of the upper chamber in general can be brought into relief, as well as the various influences represented within it and the dynamics between them.

The bishops' participation in parliament has also been indicative of Church leaders' changing conception of their role in 'the nation', of their function within the Church, and their relationship to society, with other churches, and with the agents of the state. Throughout the twentieth century, parliament provided a prominent setting in which the responsibilities incumbent on the leaders of the established Church could be discharged.

It is also important to acknowledge the reciprocal influences between the Church and state. Through participation in the House, the bishops could exert an influence on currents of political thinking, and on national debate on matters of moral and social concern. Yet, their agency has been circumscribed by a need to remain relevant in contemporary debates, to relate to parliamentary discussions in terms which resonated with the prevailing discourse. The compromises this required – which became greater and greater as the identities of Church and state diverged, and as public social practice departed from traditional Christian standards – influenced, in turn, the function of the Anglican episcopate, both within the Church and in relation to the state and nation.

Clearly, study of the Lords Spiritual has many important historical applications. Yet the scholarly literature on their role in the House of Lords is rather thin on the ground. It has also – largely as a result of the general turn of ecclesiastical historians away from institutional understandings – come from disciplinary traditions other than history.<sup>39</sup> The existing studies have been conducted less with the intention of deriving historical insights, than exerting political influence. They have been guided by their authors’ estimations of the value inherent in the contemporary representation of Anglican bishops in the chamber. In seeking to make a statement – sometimes inferential, sometimes not – about what the House of Lords and the Lords Spiritual *should* do, the authors have coloured their assessments of the significance of what the bishops *have* done.<sup>40</sup>

The earliest publications of note date from the 1950s, authored by the then Archbishop of York, Cyril Garbett, and by Philip Bromhead, Senior Lecturer in Politics at Durham University.<sup>41</sup> Publishing in the context of uncertainty about the capabilities of the upper chamber,<sup>42</sup> both Garbett and Bromhead openly acknowledged their intention to separate the ‘myths’ of the Lords Spiritual’s conduct

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<sup>39</sup> Matthew Grimley, ‘The fall and rise of Church and state? Religious history, politics and the state in Britain, 1961-2011’, *Studies in church history* 49 (2013), pp. 497-506.

<sup>40</sup> This is a reservation which also applies to the literature on the Lords Spiritual outside of the chronological bounds of the present study. For example, shortly after the publication of Andrew Partington’s 2006 study of the Lords Spiritual during the period from 1979 to 1990, he co-authored a report for Christian think tank Theos on the role of the parliamentary bishops. Andrew Partington, *Church and state: the contribution of the Church of England bishops to the House of Lords during the Thatcher years* (Eugene, 2006); Andrew Partington and Paul Bickley, *Coming off the bench: the past, present and future of religious representation in the House of Lords* (London, 2007).

<sup>41</sup> Cyril Garbett, ‘The Lords Spiritual’, *Parliamentary affairs*, 7 (1953), pp. 96-101; Bromhead, ‘Bishops’; P.A. Bromhead, *The House of Lords and contemporary politics* (1958, London), pp. 52-66. See also Laundry, ‘Parliament and the Church’, pp. 445-60; H.M. Waddams, ‘The attitude of the churches to politics’, *Political quarterly* 30 (1957), pp. 33-43.

<sup>42</sup> See Chris Ballinger, *The House of Lords, 1911-2011: a century of non-reform* (Oxford, 2012), p. 77; Peter Dorey, ‘Change in order to conserve: explaining the decision to introduce the 1958 Life Peerages Act’, *Parliamentary history* 28 (2009), pp. 247-54; Donald Shell, *The House of Lords* (Oxford, 1988), pp. 13-17.

from the supposed ‘facts’.<sup>43</sup> These were broadly historical, though also deeply political, studies. They contrasted what they supposed to be the bishops’ contemporary conduct with that of earlier generations, drawing principally from the published *House of Lords Debates*, from political and ecclesiastical biography, and in Garbett’s case from personal reflections. They came to the same essential conclusion: the Lords Spiritual were ideally suited to the needs of parliamentary government at the time of publication. They were specialists, confining themselves to debates on which they could profess expertise. ‘[A] feeling seems to have grown up’, Bromhead noted, ‘that [the Lords Spiritual] ought to show interest in debates on moral, educational, or social questions’.<sup>44</sup> Garbett’s claim for the bishops’ conduct was more specific still, stipulating a number of domestic and international moral and social concerns – all subjects on which he had been personally active.<sup>45</sup> Garbett and Bromhead essentially cast the Lords Spiritual as a template for the envisaged life peers: members of the chamber who could be expected to be active on, and bring expert understanding to, niche areas of the House’s technical work.<sup>46</sup>

Social-scientific contributions emerged from the mid-1960s. Like the earlier works, the most significant study, by Gavin Drewry and Jenny Brock, was directly inspired by contemporary considerations of the bishops’ role – in this case, the discussions of House of Lords reform in the late 1960s and the publication of the report of the archbishops’ commission on Church and state in 1970.<sup>47</sup> The literature

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<sup>43</sup> Bromhead, ‘Bishops’, p. 491. See also Sydney D. Bailey, ‘Introduction’, in Sydney D. Bailey (ed.), *The future of the House of Lords* (London, 1954).

<sup>44</sup> Bromhead, ‘Bishops’, p. 495.

<sup>45</sup> Garbett, ‘Lords Spiritual’, p. 101.

<sup>46</sup> The Life Peerages Act was passed in 1958, five years after Garbett’s article was published, and a year after Bromhead’s.

<sup>47</sup> Gavin Drewry and Jenny Brock, ‘Prelates in parliament’, *Parliamentary affairs* 24 (1970), pp. 222–50. See also the less rigorous study by Vincent Weare, ‘The Lords Spiritual’, *Church quarterly review* 167 (1966), pp. 208–14; and the more general study by John R. Seagrave, ‘A model of organised group behaviour for the Church in British politics’, *Parliamentary affairs* 27 (1974), pp. 397–409.



also emerged to some extent as a reaction to the apparent incongruity of the presence of Anglican bishops in a legislature which was presiding over a ‘secular society’.

‘[I]n an age when a pluralist society has rendered the always elusive concept of a common morality all but meaningless’, Drewry and Brock questioned whether ‘Lords Spiritual’ were needed at all.<sup>48</sup> Unlike the earlier work, their study was founded on a detailed statistical analysis of the bishops’ contributions to the House during the 1960s.<sup>49</sup> Regardless, the authors found themselves in warm agreement with Bromhead and Garbett: the Lords Spiritual were well adapted to the needs of the contemporary legislature. In rhetorically considering whether the House of Lords was ‘a better place’ with the presence of Anglican bishops, they came out ‘unhesitatingly ... in the affirmative’.<sup>50</sup>

That the literature reached a consensus about the value of the Lords Spiritual is unsurprising. In seeking to influence the political and constitutional debates of the early 1970s, Drewry and Brock attempted to increase the authority of their study by claiming continuity with the earlier work. It was a contrivance which raises issues of approach and interpretation. For one thing, the studies do not form a consistent chronology, Bromhead’s largely considering the decade to the mid-1950s, and Drewry’s and Brock’s nominally relating to the decade from 1960, though in places their evidence was more limited still.<sup>51</sup> Moreover, Drewry and Brock sought to use Bromhead’s largely qualitative insights into the role of the Lords Spiritual in the 1950s to provide contextual meaning for their statistical observations from the

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<sup>48</sup> Drewry and Brock, ‘Prelates’, p. 222.

<sup>49</sup> This was the same methodology Drewry and Brock had used in their companion article on the Law Lords. Gavin Drewry and Jenny Brock, ‘Law Lords as legislators’ *Parliamentary affairs*, 22 (1969), pp. 226-39.

<sup>50</sup> Drewry and Brock, ‘Prelates’, pp. 246-8.

<sup>51</sup> For example, the figures for the bishops’ attendance in the House were drawn from the parliamentary paper published in advance of the Parliament (No. 2) Bill of 1969. These covered the attendance only for the five sessions between 1963 and 1968.

1960s. It was an interpretative approach which served the authors' aims of making an apparently authoritative statement on the contemporary conduct of the parliamentary bishops. However, their uncritical analysis and application of the earlier literature – even leaving aside their contemporary political motivations and rather patchy chronology – raises questions about the historical reliability of their work.

The chief justification for study of the Lords Spiritual lies in the bishops' substantive historical importance. However, the problems evident in the existing literature suggest how an historically rigorous study might be conducted. In the first place, it is clear that a long chronology is required – an approach which is uncommon in essentially 'political' histories. In the case of the Lords Spiritual, a long chronology provides for the better identification of patterns of conduct, for a more illuminating consideration of patterns of change in the relationship between Church, state and society, and for more revealing contrasts to be drawn.

Of course, setting the limits for such a study is to an extent arbitrary. All periods are periods of transition; historical change does not abate for the historian's convenience. However, taking into consideration moments of significant political and ecclesiastical change, there is a compelling case for focusing on the period that reaches from the primacy of Randall Davidson to that of Michael Ramsey, from c. 1903 to 1974. In many ways, Davidson's archiepiscopate from 1903 can be considered as the 'last gasp' of an older, Victorian formulation of the religious establishment and political identity. Until at least the outbreak of war in August 1914, the fault lines of British party-politics continued along their late-Victorian, constitutional trajectory; political divisions were, in part, defined by religious conflict and denomination identities. This was a formulation of political and

ecclesiastical relations which would not last the war. In a similar way, the primacy of Michael Ramsey represented a sea change for Church and state. The period of Ramsey's archiepiscopate coincided with the advance of 'secular', 'permissive' society', and culminated with renewed ecclesiastical reflections on the desired relationship with the state.<sup>52</sup> By the time of his retirement in 1974, the social and political watershed of the 'long 1960s' is considered typically to have come to an end.<sup>53</sup> That year also marked the beginning of the dismantling of the post-war economic consensus. The rejection of 30 years' experience of mixed economy, high welfare spending, and trade union influence was made manifest by the ascendancy of the Thatcher governments from 1979.<sup>54</sup>

The stance taken by the Lords Spiritual since the 1970s had persisted. That is to say, by 1974 the essential patterns of the bishops' present conduct and approach to the House had been established. This much seems evident from the published records of the House of Lords, the public statements of the bishops, and the research on the contemporary Lords Spiritual.<sup>55</sup> As such, a study of the period c. 1903-1974 is particularly apt to provide compelling answers to the research questions detailed above.<sup>56</sup>

Taking a long chronological approach, it is possible to adapt some elements of the approaches taken by the previous literature. In particular, a statistical survey of the frequency and subjects of the bishops' contributions – similar to, but more extensive than that conducted by Drewry and Brock – has been undertaken for the

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<sup>52</sup> See *Church and state: report of the archbishops' commission* (London, 1970).

<sup>53</sup> Arthur Marwick, *The sixties: cultural revolution in Britain, France, Italy and the United States, c. 1958-1974* (Oxford, 1998), p. 7.

<sup>54</sup> Kenneth Morgan, *Britain since 1945: the people's peace* (Oxford, 2001), p. 437.

<sup>55</sup> See, for example, Partington and Bickley, *Coming off the bench*.

<sup>56</sup> There is a further methodological issue to consider. Many pertinent resources – not least the archbishops' papers held by Lambeth Palace Library – are subject to a thirty-year closure rule, and so not available for much of the period after 1974.

entire period of the study from the early 1900s to the mid-1970s. There are, of course, inherent difficulties in carrying out such a task. Debates in the House of Lords tend to address a range of subjects, and often their ecclesiastical and political significance is not immediately apparent. Discussions on housing issues, for example, might variously consider planning regulations, environmental concerns, the promotion of the family unit, or simply architectural preference.

The historian approaching the work of the Lords Spiritual over the long term is, however, confronted by the essential problem of the volume of the bishops' contributions. During the seventy years considered in this study, the Lords Spiritual made in excess of 2,500 individual contributions to debates in the House of Lords. Clearly, problematic though the method may be, some categorisation of these contributions is essential if a practical and coherent approach to the subject is to be made, and if the resulting study is to be comprehensible. To this end, the precedent set by previous investigations has been adapted. The Lambeth Palace authorities conducted their own study in the 1960s, for which they devised six categories [see Appendix A]. A few years later, Drewry and Brock formulated 26 – expressing their displeasure that several remained 'rather unwieldy' [see Appendix B].<sup>57</sup> Although neither of these approaches can simply be translated into the present study, a version of both has substantial value. By working at these two levels – a small number of wide categories, and a great many more granulated subcategories – it is possible to

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<sup>57</sup> Beloe note, 4 Dec. 1967, RP 134/1; Drewry and Brock, 'Prelates', pp. 234-6. Further attempts at this task for later periods were made by Francis Bown and Andrew Partington. Francis Bown, 'Influencing the House of Lords: the role of the Lords Spiritual 1979-1987', *Political studies* 42 (1994), p. 109; Partington, *Church and state*, *passim*.

draw both broad generalisations and contrasts between periods, and derive highly-period specific insights [see Appendix C].<sup>58</sup>

Understandings from this quantitative survey have been given contextual meaning through, primarily, reference to the literature on the political and ecclesiastical situation. This has then been used to guide the selection and study of the written records of episcopal contributions to parliamentary debates. As a result, distinct periods of episcopal conduct in the House can be identified. Accordingly, the thesis is divided into three parts: c. 1903-1920, c. 1920-1945, and c. 1945-1974. The first chapter of each of these parts will centre on analysis of trends in the public conduct of the Lords Spiritual in the House – their essential parliamentary function, the character of their engagement, and their apparent response to changing ecclesiastical, political, and social conditions.

The historical value of such a study over an extended period will become more apparent as the thesis progresses. Yet as the existing literature attests, this type of approach can provide only a partial explanation of the role of the parliamentary bishops. Quantitative analysis is based upon the ‘outputs’ of the Lords Spiritual’s engagement – that is to say, the presentation of their role as a matter of public record. Such an approach is less apt to provide understanding of the specific dynamics, influences on, and mechanisms by which change in the Lords Spiritual’s conduct was brought about – the ‘inputs’ to the Church’s parliamentary engagement.

In order to deepen the study in these ways, this thesis will consider a considerable amount of additional primary material – published and unpublished – relating to the influences acting upon the parliamentary bishops. Of greatest

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<sup>58</sup> Twelve broad categories have been devised, and beneath these 50 subcategories. Where necessary, a limited number of further subdivisions have been made. See Appendix C.

importance will be the collections in Lambeth Palace Library: records of the regular Bishops' Meetings<sup>59</sup> and the archbishop's staff, and, most importantly, the papers of the archbishops of Canterbury themselves. The primate was for the great majority of the period the most significant episcopal contributor to the House, while Lambeth Palace served as an organisational centre – at various times, officially and unofficially – for the Church's parliamentary liaison. As the archbishops' staff kept excellent records of correspondence, it is also possible to consider in some detail the various interactions between parliamentarians, civil servants, bishops, and religious leaders which helped to determine episcopal conduct in the House.

The extent of the material available at Lambeth attests to the political and ecclesiastical importance of the Lords Spiritual during the twentieth century, though it also presents difficulties. It is important not to rely overly on the 'Lambeth view'. This perspective will be balanced and augmented where appropriate by consideration of published and unpublished primary material relating to particularly significant ecclesiastics, the influences and agenda of leading lay peers and churchmen, the deliberations of government and Church agencies, and the attitudes of other denominations and the established Church's political adversaries.

Although this study is the most extensive and coherent analysis of the Lords Spiritual yet undertaken, it would be naïve to suggest that it is not limited in various ways. The necessary sampling of contributions to debates means that some otherwise notable episodes will receive little comment. For example, the bishops' conduct during the two world wars makes relatively little impression on the thesis. While the prophetic interventions of the Bishop of Chichester, George Bell, during the Second

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<sup>59</sup> Gatherings of the diocesan (and suffragan) bishops of England and Wales at Lambeth, usually twice a year, and usually under the chairmanship of the Archbishop of Canterbury.

World War have received significant academic scrutiny,<sup>60</sup> their place in the thesis is actually rather marginal.

Such omissions are intentional and unavoidable. They should not be taken to imply that the response of the parliamentary bishops to the dislocations and expediencies of the two world wars is intrinsically unimportant or uninteresting. However, the thesis is concerned with the identification, explanation, and analysis of the general patterns of conduct among the Lords Spiritual. In this context, the bishops' interventions during the wars were of less consequence than might be assumed. As Chapter 1 will show, there was a significant measure of continuity in the bishops' approaches to foreign and imperial issues, both before and during the First World War. The Second World War had a more obvious effect on the Lords Spiritual's conduct – most notably, seeming to herald a significant decline in the number of contributions made by the Archbishop of Canterbury. However, such shifts were not sustained; as the immediate social and political crises precipitated by that war's conclusion abated, the bishops' conduct largely returned to its inter-war patterns.

What emerges from the approach taken by this thesis is by no means a comprehensive study of the Lords Spiritual – but nor does it aspire to be. Rather, what it provides is a new understanding of ecclesiastical and parliamentary identity, and the political process in Britain, over the greater part of the twentieth century. On a grander scale, it invites reflection on the political role of the established Church of

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<sup>60</sup> Andrew Chandler, 'Church of England and obliteration bombing of Germany in the Second World War', *English historical review* 108 (1993), pp. 920-46; Andrew Chandler, "'The Church and humanity': George Bell and the life of the Church in the twentieth century", in Andrew Chandler (ed.), *The Church and humanity: the life and work of George Bell, 1929-1958* (Farnham, 2012), pp. 1-24.

England, a role which extended far beyond the immediate bounds of the Lords Spiritual.

The first part of this thesis considers the period between c. 1903 and 1920, during which the existing formulation of the relationship between Church and state faced serious challenges. Competing assertions of older-style patrician authority and that of an emerging democratic mandate placed constitutional issues at the centre of political conflict. These chiefly concerned the union with Ireland,<sup>61</sup> though they extended into further areas of public life, including the institutional association between Church and state.<sup>62</sup> Political identities assumed an overt denominational identity, with English and Welsh nonconformists seeking redress of the civic disadvantages they suffered under the religious establishment by means of concerted electoral influence.<sup>63</sup> In parliament, the Lords Spiritual faced the renewed and increasing challenges to the Church's institutional relationship with the state – in particular, its role in primary education and, more pressingly still, the establishment of the Church in Wales. At the same time, from their place within a bastion of patrician privilege, they had to respond to the changing political discourse in a society which was not only religiously plural, but increasingly democratic.

Particular consideration will be given to the Lords Spiritual's involvement in the passage of the Parliament Bill during 1911. At a pivotal moment, the outcome of the division in the House of Lords on this bill, which, among other things, would

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<sup>61</sup> Philip Norton, 'Resisting the inevitable? The Parliament Act 1911', *Parliamentary history* 31 (2012), pp. 444-59.

<sup>62</sup> Andrew Adonis, *Making aristocracy work: the peerage and the political system in Britain, 1884-1914* (Oxford, 1993), pp. 137-8; Neal Blewett, *The peers, the parties and the people: the British general elections of 1910* (London, 1972), p. 61.

<sup>63</sup> D.W. Bebbington, *The nonconformist conscience: chapel and politics, 1870-1914* (London, 1982); Stephen Koss, *Nonconformity in modern British politics* (London, 1975), esp. ch. 6; Noel J. Richards, 'The Education Bill of 1906 and the decline of political nonconformity', *Journal of ecclesiastical history* 23 (1972), pp. 49-63. See also, Alan Wilkinson, *Dissent or conform? War, peace and the English churches, 1900-1945* (Cambridge, 1986).



effectively determine the future of the Church in Wales, seemed to turn on the votes of the bishops' parliamentary bench. The crisis temporarily, though significantly, increased the political significance of the Lords Spiritual. It threw into sharp relief the ecclesiastical and political expectations of their conduct in the House. Aware of their unusually crucial parliamentary influence, the episode brought to the fore the ways in which the bishops conceived of their role in relation to the peers, the political parties, and to parliament, their responsibilities to the Church and its lay members, and their place in the nation itself.

The second part of this thesis examines the period between c. 1920 and 1945, with an emphasis on the years before the outbreak of war in 1939. It has been argued persuasively that the Church was in a stronger national position after the war than it had been before. The decline of political nonconformity and the Liberal Party, and the shift in political discourse away from constitutional issues towards matters of economic and social concern, meant that the immediate challenges to the religious establishment were largely dissipated. Conversely, Christianity continued to permeate public life and civic ritual, reinforced by the traumas of the First World War and culturally promoted by the BBC.<sup>64</sup> Christian perspectives on social relations and conceptions of the national community remained intellectually influential.<sup>65</sup> Meanwhile, the advent in 1919 of a measure of self-government for the Church of

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<sup>64</sup> Green, *Passing*, pp. 60-80; S.J.D. Green, 'Survival and autonomy: on the strange fortunes and peculiar legacy of ecclesiastical establishment in the modern British state, c. 1920 to the present day', in S.J.D. Green and R.C. Whiting (eds.), *The boundaries of the state in modern Britain* (Cambridge, 1996), p. 305. For comment on the Church of England's influence on national identity, see Matthew Grimley, 'The religion of Englishness: puritanism, providentialism, and "national character"', *Journal of British studies* 46 (2007), pp. 884-906.

<sup>65</sup> Grimley, *Citizenship*.

England provided it with the opportunity, after a long period of inertia, to revitalise its institutions, adapt its administration, and revise its worship.<sup>66</sup>

The Church's apparent strength in other aspects of national life raises questions about the role of the Lords Spiritual within parliament. The political and ecclesiastical concerns which had previously been crucial in the definition of the bishops' role in the House of Lords, and indeed in the nation, had largely been resolved. While in many respects the Church in the inter-war period proved better able to carry out a national role, within parliament the bishops became a marginal influence. The number of bishops involved in the House of Lords' debates declined, and the scope of their interests narrowed.

At least two sources of this change can be identified. First, the bishops' participation in the House was increasingly focused on matters of direct ecclesiastical interest, particularly in relation to Church reform. Second, the political importance of the Lords Spiritual – their place in, and influence on, the crucial political divisions of the time – declined significantly. These shifts will be considered through an examination of ecclesiastical reform and House of Lords reform during the 1920s. The final chapter of this section will consider those bishops who, against the trend, remained particularly active in the House, and what their continued presence in parliament suggested about attitudes within the Church towards its relationship with the state.

The third part of this thesis considers the period between c. 1945 and 1974, and is one of particular consequence. The role of the Church in public life declined from the late 1950s. Rates of participation in Christian social practices and levels of

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<sup>66</sup> Kenneth Thompson, *Bureaucracy and Church reform: the organizational response of the Church of England to social change, 1800-1965* (Oxford, 1970), pp. 179-202.

affiliation with the Church, which had been effectively static for a century, entered an increasingly rapid, and apparently irrevocable, decline from 1958.<sup>67</sup> During the 1960s, the sacral foundations of criminal law began to be undermined, starting with the Suicide Act of 1961 and culminating in what ‘progressive’ moral opinion considered to be the *annus mirabilis* of 1967.<sup>68</sup> From at least 1963, it had become a commonplace in elite discourse to talk of a ‘secular society’, in which belief in the supernatural had a marginal place. Members of the Church had a crucial part in identifying processes of ‘secularisation’ and popularising this idea.<sup>69</sup> Further, it had a significant influence, stretching back as far as the interwar period, in setting the conceptual groundwork for at least some of the ‘permissive’ legislation which passed into law in the 1960s.<sup>70</sup>

This was also an important period for the House of Lords. Out of the malaise of the 1950s – during which attendance in, and respect for, the chamber had languished – the introduction of life peers after 1958 and the increasingly technical nature of parliamentary business dramatically altered the character of the House. Its scrutiny of legislation and the executive became more rigorous and determined, and

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<sup>67</sup> Brown, *Death*, pp. 3-7, 187-90. See also, ‘British religion in numbers’ [ [www.brin.ac.uk](http://www.brin.ac.uk) ].

<sup>68</sup> G.I.T. Machin, *Churches and social issues in twentieth-century Britain* (Oxford, 1998), chs. 5 and 6; G.I.T. Machin, ‘British churches and moral change in the 1960s’, in W.M. Jacob and Nigel Yates (eds.), *Crown and mitre: religion and society in northern Europe since the reformation* (Woodbridge, 1993), pp. 223-43.

<sup>69</sup> Sam Brewitt-Taylor, ‘The invention of a “secular society”? Christianity and the sudden appearance of secularization discourses in the British national media’, *Twentieth-century British history* 24 (2013), pp. 335-46; Brown, *Death*, pp. 1, 181-7; Callum Brown, ‘What was the religious crisis of the 1960s?’, *Journal of religious history* 34 (2010), pp. 468-79; Green, *Passing*, ch. 8, esp. pp. 277-80; Hugh McLeod, *The religious crisis of the 1960s* (Oxford, 2007), ch. 11.

<sup>70</sup> Jones, ‘Moral welfare’, pp. 197-213; Laura Ramsay, ‘The ambiguities of Christian sexual discourse in post-war Britain: the British Council of Churches and its early moral welfare work’, *Journal of religious history* 40 (2016), pp. 82-103.

expectations grew that its members should possess demonstrable professional expertise when intervening on debates.<sup>71</sup>

The Lords Spiritual, situated at the interface between Church and state, provide a unique perspective on the Church's efforts to establish a place in the technocratic and 'secular' society which was emerging. The parliamentary bishops were called to respond to changing social practices and ethical beliefs, patterns of intellectual and ethical thought, and the expectations of participation in debates on increasingly technical legislation. Through understanding the bishops' role in the House, the influences on – and the intentions of – their rhetoric, their organisation and their engagement with other policy-makers, it is possible to infer important features of the Church's conception of its place in, and role in informing, the 'secular society'.

A small number of publications have examined the Church's role in the passage of the laws that liberalised sexual and social conduct. As a body of work, they present a rather episodic understanding of the Church's influence, with individual studies examining specific instances of reform.<sup>72</sup> This is not unwarranted, since 'permissive' legislation did not constitute a political 'programme' as such, so much as a series of largely disconnected policy initiatives. However, having developed and popularised the notion of the 'secular society', the response of the Church authorities towards the ramifications of 'secularism' was hardly so disjointed. Ecclesiastical reform in the 1950s had its origins in the churchmen's fear of the growing irrelevance of religious belief. The effect of the restructuring of

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<sup>71</sup> Bromhead, *House of Lords*, ch. 3; Janet Morgan, *The House of Lords and the Labour government* (Oxford, 1975), ch. 1; Shell, *House of Lords*, pp. 33-42; John Vincent, 'The House of Lords', *Parliamentary affairs* 19 (1966), pp. 475-85.

<sup>72</sup> Stephen Cretney, *Law, law reform and the family* (Oxford, 1998), pp. 33-71; Grimley, 'Law, morality, secularisation', pp. 725-41; Lewis and Wallis, 'Fault', pp. 308-32.

ecclesiastical institutions on the Lords Spiritual's engagement in the House was considerable, suggesting an extensive reconfiguration of the Church's relationship to institutional politics and to national discourse.

The bishops' changing approach to parliamentary debates was highly suggestive of the religious establishment's capacity for re-invention and adaptation. Church authorities were anxious to preserve the influence of transcendental values, which they regarded as crucial for the stable conduct of social relations, despite the apparent triumph of the 'secular society'. They did not, as E.R. Norman and others have argued, simply 'give way' to the predominant contemporary mores in some cynical effort to maintain a semblance of influence and status.<sup>73</sup> Rather, the Lords Spiritual assumed the language of the contemporary discourse in order that the essential 'Christian' values which they represented might exert an influence on parliamentary debate. Paradoxically, despite the decline of popular participation in organised Christian religion, the Christian influence in parliament grew.

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<sup>73</sup> E.R. Norman, *Church and society in England, 1770-1970: a historical study* (Oxford, 1976), esp. pp. 1-15. See also Barbara Brookes, *Abortion in England, 1900-1967* (London, 1988), esp. p. 154; Hugh McLeod, 'God and the gallows: Christianity and capital punishment in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries', *Studies in Church history* 40 (2004), esp. p. 351.

# Part 1

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The first chapter of Part 1 will survey the conduct of the Lords Spiritual during the period from c. 1903 to 1920. In providing an overview of the bishops' role in the House, it will place their interventions in the broader political and ecclesiastical context. The Lords Spiritual – as, indeed, the Church itself – had to respond to the developing discourse which pitted traditional 'patrician' forms of political authority against the popular electoral mandate. It was the result of a party-political dynamic which had come to focus on constitutional questions, chiefly concerning the future of the union with Ireland, but also encompassing a number of Church issues. The Lords Spiritual confronted not just a potentially hostile political discourse, but a growing parliamentary challenge to the religious establishment.

The second chapter will consider in more detail the Lords Spiritual's role in the passage of the Parliament Bill through the House of Lords during 1911. The nature of this bill, and the finely balanced party division in the chamber on this issue, invested the parliamentary bishops with exceptional ecclesiastical and political importance. The circumstances served to expose the bishops' effective position in the House, the particular influences and constraints acting upon it, their place within the party-political contest and the parliamentary process, and their relationship to the peers and to the political parties.

## 1. The Lords Spiritual, c. 1903-1920

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The early years of the twentieth century marked a liminal moment in British politics. The expansions of the franchise in 1832, 1867 and 1884, and the subsequent development of extensive party organisations had gone some way in disrupting the political authority of the landed magnates who had dominated Georgian and early Victorian politics. Yet, the supremacy of the electoral mandate was far from realised. The tension between these two forms of political authority – one patrician and hereditary, the other quasi-democratic and nominally representative – were manifested in the constitutional questions which characterised political discourse. From at least 1885, these chiefly concerned the union with Ireland, though they also extended into many areas of civic, and indeed parliamentary, life.

It was symptomatic of the shifting locus of political power from the mid-Victorian period that these issues included the character of – indeed, the very existence of – the religious establishment. The increasing susceptibility of party-political organisations to electoral pressures provided an opportunity for religious nonconformists in England and Wales to seek the redress of the civic grievances they suffered under the religious establishment – in the opening of government posts to non-Anglicans, in the payment of Church rates, in the provision and character of public education, and so on. The most potent campaigning force, the ‘British anti-state Church Association’<sup>1</sup> – better known simply as the ‘Liberation Society’ – aimed not just at ending discriminatory practices, but ultimately at the disestablishment of the Church of England itself. This it sought through the exertion

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<sup>1</sup> Renamed in 1853 as the ‘Society for the Liberation of the Church from State Patronage and Control’.

of electoral pressure – through agitation on the public platform, mass petitioning, and the lobbying of constituency MPs.

The leaders of the Church of England had traditionally baulked at involvement in the affairs of political parties; far better to exert influence through their direct access to the agents and institutions of the state, not least through the House of Lords and the ‘Westminster village’.<sup>2</sup> It was suggestive of the growing perception of the vulnerability of the religious establishment to the emerging political dynamics that Church groups which aped the tactics of the Liberation Society began to form in the mid nineteenth century.<sup>3</sup> The Church Institution, founded in 1859 and reconstituted as the Church Defence Institution (CDI)<sup>4</sup> in 1871, sought no less than to defend and maintain the established Church’s ‘rights and privileges in relation to the state’ through the mass platform. Crucially, after the CDI’s reconstruction in 1871, it obtained the support of much of the Anglican episcopate; the Archbishop of Canterbury became its honorary president, and nearly all the bishops became vice-presidents.<sup>5</sup>

Although the CDI studiously disclaimed any particular party preference, its foray into electoral politics, and the Liberal Party’s embrace of the issue of disestablishment of the Church of Ireland in 1867, placed Church defence efforts firmly on one side of the party-political debate.<sup>6</sup> From the late 1860s, the CDI was

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<sup>2</sup> E.R. Norman, *Church and society in England 1770-1970: a historical study* (Oxford, 1976), ch. 5, esp. pp. 185-8.

<sup>3</sup> See for broader context, M.J.D. Roberts, ‘Pressure-group politics and the Church of England: the Church Defence Institution 1859-1896’, *Journal of ecclesiastical history* 35 (1984), pp. 560-8.

<sup>4</sup> In 1896, the Church defence organisation further merged with the ‘Central Church Committee’, formed two years earlier to plan the defence of the religious establishment in Wales. The amalgam was renamed the ‘Church Committee for Church Defence and Church Instruction’ – shortened in 1908 to the ‘Church Committee for Defence and Instruction’. For ease of expression, the Church defence organisation which was in operation from 1859 will be referred to as CDI.

<sup>5</sup> Five did not. Norman, *Church and society*, p. 190; Roberts, ‘Pressure-group politics’, p. 564

<sup>6</sup> Norman, *Church and society*, p. 190. See also Roberts, ‘Pressure-group politics’, pp. 572-3.



closely associated with the developing machinery of popular conservatism, embodied not least by H.C. Raikes, who was influential in establishing the electoral apparatus of the Conservative Party and was also CDI chairman from 1868 to 1874.<sup>7</sup> Even the grandee of ‘One Nation’ conservatism, Benjamin Disraeli, declared himself in 1872 ‘entirely at the service of the “Church Defence Institution”’ in ‘the best and most sacred of causes’.<sup>8</sup> Through the CDI, the lines between the interests of Conservative (and from the 1890s Unionist) statesmen and the leaders of the established Church blurred, as they joined together not only in cause, but on the platform.

Although the Liberation Society had essentially abandoned its electoral activities by the 1890s, the deepening association between religious nonconformity and the Liberal Party ensured that the party character of the conflict between established Church and dissenting denominations continued to grow. The National Council of Evangelical Free Churches founded in 1895 – better known as the National Free Church Council<sup>9</sup> – and its local subsidiaries gave nonconformity, in the words of one contemporary commentator, ‘an organized host’.<sup>10</sup> It provided the Free Churches with the organisational coherence necessary to transform their nebulous set of civic grievances into a political programme. Through its offices and its sophisticated campaigning and electioneering machinery, the Free Churches wrought considerable influence over the Liberal Party.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Roberts, ‘Pressure-group politics’, pp. 567-8; N.D. Daglish, ‘Raikes, Henry Cecil’, ODNB.

<sup>8</sup> Quoted in Roberts, ‘Pressure-group politics’, p. 569.

<sup>9</sup> Not to be confused with the Federal Council of the Evangelical Free Churches, which was formed as a complement to the National Council in 1916. The two councils merged in September 1940. See Stephen Koss, *Nonconformity in modern British politics* (London, 1975), pp. 28-9.

<sup>10</sup> A.L. Lowell, *The government of England*, 2 vols. (New York, 1908), II, p. 380.

<sup>11</sup> D.W. Bebbington, *The nonconformist conscience: chapel and politics, 1870-1914* (London, 1982), ch. 4; Koss, *Nonconformity*, esp. pp. 28-9, ch. 3; G.I.T. Machin, *Politics and the churches in Great Britain, 1869-1921* (Oxford, 1987), pp. 191-214.

The National Council's activity reached its peak during the 1906 election, capitalising on nonconformist outrage at the 1902 Education Act to bolster the size of the Liberal electorate.<sup>12</sup> The Liberal Party's majority was bigger than that of any government since 1832. The number of nonconformist Liberal MPs alone outnumbered Unionists in the House.<sup>13</sup> The scale of the Liberal victory and the character of its electoral support ensured that nonconformist grievances would be prominent in the government's programme, not least the dissatisfaction with the subsidising of Church of England schools<sup>14</sup> from compulsory local rates. More concerning still for churchmen, although disestablishment had not formed a major component of the platform in that election, the Liberal election brought into the realm of the politically possible the ending of the religious establishment in Wales, where the Free Churches collectively had more adherents than the established Church. 'This I will say', Lloyd George commented to his constituents in December 1905, 'of the nineteen men who constitute the Cabinet, nineteen are in favour of [Welsh] disestablishment'.<sup>15</sup>

After 1905, the Lords Spiritual were confronted by the threat – growing in fits and starts – to the religious establishment, while the Church itself was thrust into the centre of the party-political division. Circumstances had conspired to invest the House of Lords with exceptional ecclesiastical importance, and the Lords Spiritual with particular political importance. This confluence heightened the significance of the bishops' participation in the House; it provided both the facilities by which the religious establishment might be defended, and a platform from which the inductive

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<sup>12</sup> Bebbington, *Nonconformist conscience*, pp. 76-8, 141-142; Koss, *Nonconformity*, pp. 69-74; Machin, *Politics and the churches*, pp. 247-9, 275-6.

<sup>13</sup> Machin, *Politics and the churches*, p. 278; Kenneth Morgan, *Wales in British politics, 1868-1922* (Cardiff, 1991), pp. 219-21.

<sup>14</sup> And, indeed, those of the Roman Catholic Church.

<sup>15</sup> J. Grigg, *Lloyd George: the people's champion, 1902-1911* (London, 1978), p. 95.

reasoning that religious establishment was incompatible with a plural, increasingly democratic culture could be resisted.

Through their rhetoric and conduct in the House, the bishops cast the establishment as an essential component in the nation's social and political success. The Lords Spiritual themselves personified the Church's peculiar historical place in the balance of constitutional forces. Ostensibly unaffected by the pernicious influences which preyed upon the party politicians, they claimed that they were peculiarly able to define the objective 'national interest' and to encourage the peers to pursue it. Although this role was evident in, for example, the bishops' defence of what they supposed were the principles which underpinned the nation's foreign affairs, it was most prominent when questions of the institutional relationship between Church and state arose. It was also in these instances that their rhetoric clashed most with their actions. There was, of course, no objective 'national interest', only various interpretations of the 'national interest' – indeed, different 'national interests'. While the Lords Spiritual believed it essential for the social good that disestablishment be prevented, from the standpoint of nonconformists, the defence of the church establishment appeared as markedly partisan and patently party-political. The Lords Spiritual were involved in a delicate balancing act; at once, they sought to adapt to the increasingly democratic political discourse, while also using their privileged access to the institutions of government to maintain forms of patrician authority.

The extent to which the House of Lords was integrated into the Church defence campaign became evident on the inception of the 1905 Liberal government. In delivering on the demands of many of the party's electors, the President of the Board of Education, Augustine Birrell, introduced an education bill in 1906. It

proposed to ‘secularise’ public elementary schools, supplanting religious authority in the selection of teachers and in the provision of religious education with that of the local authorities.<sup>16</sup> Leaders of the established Church bitterly denounced the bill. Bishops worked alongside Anglican peers – such as the Anglo-Catholic Lord Halifax – to coordinate public meetings in their dioceses and encourage petitioning in support of denominational education.<sup>17</sup> From April to July 1906, 1,400 protest meetings were held in England and Wales, and almost a million people signed petitions against the bill.<sup>18</sup> Although the campaign on the public platform was clearly extensive, the crucial forum of opposition was the House of Lords. On 1 August, the first day of the Lords’ debate on the bill, twenty-one Lords Spiritual crowded the episcopal benches. As the bill progressed, sixteen individual bishops made lengthy contributions, several on repeated occasions. So focused was episcopal attention, that a full quarter of *all* the contributions of the parliamentary bishops between the parliamentary sessions of 1904 and 1913 were devoted to the passage of this one bill [see fig. 1 below].

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<sup>16</sup> Morgan, *Wales in British politics*, pp. 223-4.

<sup>17</sup> Machin, *Politics and the churches*, pp. 284-90.

<sup>18</sup> See account of the campaign in, G.K.A. Bell, *Randall Davidson, Archbishop of Canterbury*, 2 vols. (London, 1935; 2nd edn. 1938), I, p. 520; Eluned E. Owen, *The later life of Bishop Owen, a son of Wales* (Llandyssul, 1961), pp. 83-92. See also, Machin, *Politics and the churches*, pp. 286-7; Noel J. Richards, ‘The education bill of 1906 and the decline of political nonconformity’, *Journal of ecclesiastical history* 23 (1972), pp. 56-7. Some Liberal Anglicans, like Lady Wimborne, Bishop John Percival of Hereford, and Hensley Henson, then Canon of Westminster Abbey, supported the bill though also sought to amend it. See Machin, *Politics and the churches*, p. 287.

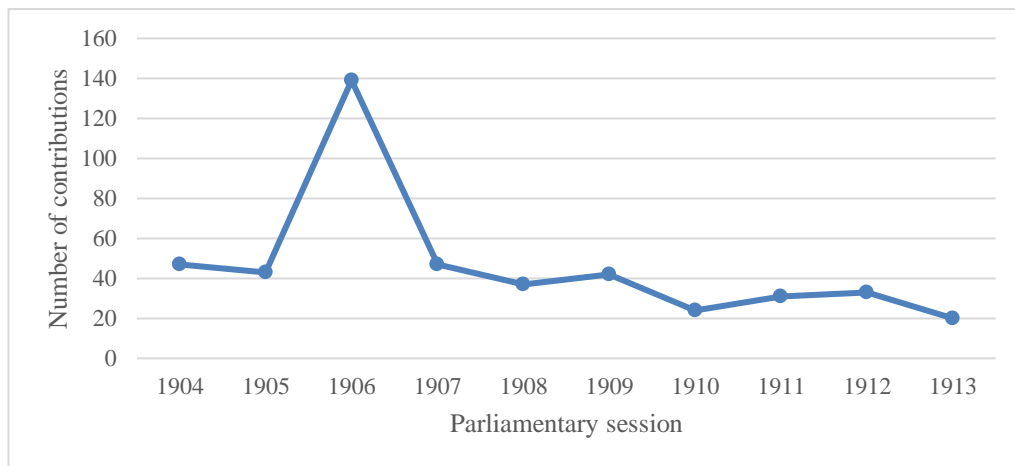


Fig. 1. Total episcopal contributions to House of Lords debates, parliamentary sessions 1904 to 1913.

The effect of the Church's tacit alliance with the Unionist parliamentarians, many of whom were involved in the CDI, became apparent. While the bill had been in the House of Commons, some bishops, notably Owen of St. David's, had spent time in the galleries of the House of Commons, observing the debates and coaching the Unionist opposition. When the bill finally arrived in the House of Lords, the Lords Spiritual worked alongside the House's preponderance of Unionist peers to amend the bill dramatically. The bishops formed a private committee, which met on occasion more than once a day, to formulate some of these amendments.<sup>19</sup> The effect was to re-introduce denominational education into the bill's provisions; quite the reverse of its original intentions. Birrell regarded the bill as it had been returned to the Commons as 'a miserable, mangled, tortured, twisted *tertium quid*'. The government, he announced, would reject the amendments, and the bill was effectively abandoned.<sup>20</sup>

An apparently simplistic political and social divide had been exposed by these events. A bill, backed by an overwhelming electoral mandate, had passed

<sup>19</sup> Owen, *Later life of Owen*, pp. 86, 91.

<sup>20</sup> Bebbington, *Nonconformist conscience*, p. 148; Machin, *Politics and the churches*, p. 288; Richards, 'Education bill', esp. pp. 57-9.

through the Commons with huge majorities; it had fallen in the Lords at the hands of the representatives of intersecting and sectional religious and political interests.<sup>21</sup> It required no great leap of the imagination to suggest that the Lords Spiritual had used their access to the machinery of government to secure the partisan institutional interests of their Church. ‘The Second Chamber’, noted the nonconformist newspaper *The British Weekly* in 1906, ‘is an instrument at the present moment in the hands of the Bishops of the privileged Church for the retention of her privileges’.<sup>22</sup> More than this, confirmation had been provided for those seeking it of the shared interests and unspoken alliance between the political, economic, social, and religious elite. This included, naturally, the Unionist Party. It also included the Anglican bishops, who, through their actions in the Lords, had acted as the Unionists’ adjuncts. The Lords’ wrecking of the Education Bill, according to another leading nonconformist newspaper, had exposed the ‘democratic’ process as ‘a pleasant farce’. ‘[T]he real Government of the country’, it continued, ‘is the Carlton Club, plus the prelates of the Anglican Church’.<sup>23</sup>

It was a homogenising, but politically compelling suggestion; the besieged forces of corruption, corralled in the House of Lords, had demonstrated the fundamental unity of their interests, and closed ranks in defence of their privileges against the just demands of electors. It was no coincidence that it was during the Education Bill controversy in 1906 that Joseph Clayton – a Christian Socialist, and early biographer and historian of the socialist and Labour movements<sup>24</sup> – published an edited volume of the Lords Spiritual’s nineteenth-century contributions to House

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<sup>21</sup> Machin, *Politics and the churches*, pp. 225–7.

<sup>22</sup> *British Weekly*, 9 Aug. 1906.

<sup>23</sup> *Christian World*, 8 Nov. 1906.

<sup>24</sup> The volume included a preface by Rev. Stewart Headlam, Church of England clergyman and Christian Socialist leader who publicly advocated for the abolition of the House of Lords. Jeremy Morris, ‘Headlam, Stewart Duckworth’, ODNB.

of Lords debates. It claimed to show that the parliamentary bishops had been consistently opposed to the (rather Whiggishly conceived) advance of social welfare and civic freedom. Over the century, Clayton asserted, the bishops' concern had only ever been

to maintain the rights and privileges of the Established Church and to resist every innovation that might threaten these rights and privileges, or endanger the constitution of which the Established Church was an integral part.<sup>25</sup>

Parallels were invited with the bishops' contemporary conduct. The nineteenth-century bishops had often been found in opposition to 'the best spirit of the age'; 'Will the Bishops of the twentieth century fall under the same condemnation a hundred years hence?'<sup>26</sup>

The implication of Clayton's work for the Christian Socialists among its readers was clear: yet more evidence had been provided that the Church had failed in its essential mission as 'the great instrument of Social Reform', impeded, in this case, by its leaders' alienation from Church life and their entanglement with sectional interests.<sup>27</sup> Nor was its polemic value lost to Liberal and nonconformist leaders interested in undermining the apparent legitimacy of the bishops' actions. John Clifford, president of the Liberation Society and leader of the nonconformists' passive resistance to the Unionist's 1902 Education Act, presented the book to a hastily organised conference on disestablishment in November 1906. If the bishops were to be judged by its contents, he bellowed, it would be

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<sup>25</sup> Joseph Clayton, *The bishops as legislators: a record of the votes and speeches delivered by the bishops of the established Church in the House of Lords during the nineteenth century* (London, 1906), pp. 10-12.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid, p. 16. A Liberation Society publication of 1894 had also included an attack on 'The Bishops as legislators' which suggested the Lords Spiritual had been the consistent opponents of liberal causes throughout the nineteenth century. *The case for disestablishment: a handbook of facts and arguments in support of the claim for religious equality* (London, 1894), pp. 88-9.

<sup>27</sup> See Headlam's preface to Clayton's volume. Clayton, *Bishops as legislators*, pp. 7-8.

as rational to expect the criminals in Wormwood Scrubbs [sic] to defend honesty and fair dealing as to expect the House of Lords to maintain the principle of justice.<sup>28</sup>

The simplistic equation of the Church with undemocratic – even anti-democratic – interests in elite society heightened the power of the rhetoric used by the political opponents of the religious establishment. The parliamentary bishops, like their predecessors, sought to defy the ‘natural’, progressive teleology of British social, civic, and constitutional development; their continued opposition to the historically ordained could not be tolerated or last for long. In the wake of the mauling of the 1906 Education Bill, Hugh Fullerton, radical Liberal MP and chairman of the Manchester School Board, requested government debating time be made available to establish ‘the desirability of relieving spiritual peers from attendance in Parliament’.<sup>29</sup>

Church leaders were well aware of the potency of the arguments ranged against the religious establishment in general, and the Lords Spiritual in particular. They proposed a contrary understanding of the Church’s role, and sought to establish a different discourse on the nature and value of the religious establishment.<sup>30</sup> Far from an anachronistic vestige of patrician authority, they contended that the religious establishment was well suited to the needs of a pluralist, increasingly democratic society; more than this, it was absolutely essential to the preservation of harmonious social and constitutional relations. The Church did not stand opposed to the teleology of British constitutionalism, but was rather deeply, fundamentally intertwined with the development and evolution of the English, and later British state. It was an

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<sup>28</sup> *Christian World*, 8 Nov. 1906.

<sup>29</sup> *Parl. Deb.* 167, c. 687, 13 Dec. 1906.

<sup>30</sup> See, for example, his reply to Birrell’s criticisms of the Lords Spiritual’s conduct, *Times*, 19 Feb. 1907; R.T. Davidson, *Votes and actions of the bishops in the House of Lords: being a letter addressed by the Archbishop of Canterbury to Mr. Birrell* (London, 1907).



‘estate of the realm’, every bit as essential in maintaining the balance of constitutional forces as the Commons, the peers, and the monarch.

The House of Lords provided a crucial forum in which this opposing vision of the Church’s role in the nation could be articulated and, indeed, put into practice. A sense of the crucial, almost mystic historical influence of the Church in the constitution was certainly apparent during considerations of reform in the composition of the House of Lords. In debating Newton’s 1907 House of Lords (reform) Bill, Davidson emphasised the Lords Spiritual’s ancient pedigree. Seeming to acknowledge the ostensibly incongruous place of the Lords Spiritual, he warned against injudicious tampering with the fundamental components of the constitution.

There are many things in old structures, whether they be buildings or bodies of men, which probably we would not place in exactly the existing form if we were constructing them anew, but with which the history and life of the country are inwrought.<sup>31</sup>

He trusted that any committee called to investigate the question of the House’s membership would take ‘the utmost care’ to consider ‘not merely the apparent necessities of the passing hour’ but the chamber’s role – indeed, that of the bishops – ‘in the History and in the life of England’.<sup>32</sup>

A House of Lords committee chaired by Earl of Rosebery resulted several months later from the debates on Newton’s bill. Newton and Rosebery shared concerns that the upper chamber, having succumbed to the party-political interests which characterised the House of Commons, was no longer able to carry out its ‘proper’ constitutional function. They sought to restore its supposed historical role as

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<sup>31</sup> *Parl. Deb.* 174, c. 9, 7 May 1907.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*

a forum of sober debate on national issues, and a revising chamber renowned for its caution and prudence.<sup>33</sup> Davidson had been concerned to secure membership of the committee, and proved to be one of its stalwarts. His positioning of the Lords Spiritual as the representatives of a constitutional tradition proved particularly resonant. In his submission on the bishops' parliamentary role, he described at length the changes in the legal provisions governing the number of Lords Spiritual stretching back to the Reformation – indeed, he devoted the majority of the memorandum to this issue.<sup>34</sup> Although he acknowledged that in a smaller chamber, as the committee envisaged, the number of Lords Spiritual should also be reduced, he warned that too severe a diminution in the bishops' bench would mean 'a serious breach with past history of an interesting kind'.<sup>35</sup>

Although the committee's report acknowledged that 'a large section of the community would be glad to relieve the Bishops of their legislative duties' – an obvious allusion to the Lords Spiritual's Liberal and nonconformist critics – the committee was concerned with constitutional 'restoration', and Davidson's arguments held sway.<sup>36</sup> Thanks to the intervention of Viscount St. Aldwyn, a leading Unionist churchman who was prominent in the campaign to defend the religious establishment in Wales, the committee's report made provision for a larger number of Lords Spiritual than even Davidson himself had envisaged.<sup>37</sup> Further still, access

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<sup>33</sup> As neither Newton's bill nor the Rosebery committee's report received much contemporary attention, and because neither had much chance of implementation, these episodes have often been passed over in histories of House of Lords reform. See, Chris Ballinger, *The House of Lords, 1911-2011: a century of non-reform* (Oxford, 2012), p. 20; Peter Raina, *House of Lords reform: a history*, I (Bern, 2011), pp. 201-7, p. 405; David Southern, 'Lord Newton, the conservative peers and the Parliament Act of 1911', *English historical review* (1981), pp. 834-40.

<sup>34</sup> Davidson had commissioned the Librarian of the House of Commons to investigate the episcopal presence in parliament since 1628. Gosse to Davidson, undated [1908], DP 437/16.

<sup>35</sup> Davidson memo. 'Spiritual Lords of Parliament', 2 Apr. 1908, DP 438/81.

<sup>36</sup> *Report from the Select Committee on the House of Lords, together with the proceedings of the committee and appendix* (London, 1908), p. 6.

<sup>37</sup> The committee's initial draft report had provided for seven Lords Spiritual in a House of up to 400 members, broadly in line with Davidson's recommendations. The final report made provision for ten.

to the bishops' parliamentary bench was to be determined by selection among the bishops themselves,<sup>38</sup> ensuring that enthusiastic ecclesiastics would ascend to the House quickly.<sup>39</sup> Had the report been put into practice, the capabilities and influence of the bishops' parliamentary bench would have been significantly increased.

In the context of a committee concerned with constitutional tradition, assertions of the bishops' parliamentary pedigree were effective. It was a line they maintained even during more politically fraught debates on constitutional issues. During the crisis presaged by the Unionist peers' rejection of the 1909 Budget, for example, Davidson asserted the bishops' right to intervene not just as the leaders of an institution deeply intertwined into the nation's social and economic life, but as 'the most ancient part of the Legislature'.<sup>40</sup> For Bishop Browne of Bristol, since the crisis had raised 'question[s] of the honour of this House', the Lords Spiritual – the oldest constituent part of that chamber and the embodiment of its long heritage – had a responsibility to speak, and a right to be heard.<sup>41</sup> This was true not just of the 1909 Finance Bill and the ensuing 1911 Parliament Bill, but of the reforms to the electoral franchise and on the granting of self-governance to Ireland. Archbishop Lang of York made three separate contributions to debates during the passage of the Government of Ireland Bill.<sup>42</sup> He justified his interventions on the basis that the bill raised questions of 'the history and welfare of the whole nation', of which the

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Compare, Davidson memo., 2 Apr. 1908, DP 438/81; Committee resolutions, 7 Apr. 1908, DP 438/83; *Report from the Select Committee on the House of Lords*, p. 26.

<sup>38</sup> The two archbishops were to be admitted on an *ex officio* basis, while eight other Lords Spiritual were to be elected by the entire Anglican diocesan episcopate.

<sup>39</sup> This would also have the effect of tempering the influence of the prime minister over the composition of the Lords Spiritual. See comments of the Duke of Northumberland, 'Suggested composition of a reformed House of Lords', undated [April 1908], DP 438/161.

<sup>40</sup> A fact he established by noting that the 'Lords Spiritual' had been named in the preamble of every Act of parliament to that date. *HL Deb.* 4, c. 940, 24 Nov. 1909.

<sup>41</sup> *HL Deb.* 4, c. 768, 22 Nov. 1909.

<sup>42</sup> *HL Deb.* 16, cc. 554-62, 1 Jul. 1914; *HL Deb.* 16, cc. 907-8, 8 Jul. 1914; *HL Deb.* 16, cc. 1153-9, 14 Jul. 1914.

bishops, uniquely involved in both elements, ‘may without presumption say what we think’.<sup>43</sup>

In such matters, where the bishops’ influence might be exposed to greater scrutiny, the claims made of the Lords Spiritual’s alchemic constitutional role were often more specific still. Despite the place of Church issues in the political discourse, and the tacit alliance between most of the Anglican episcopate and many Unionist statesmen through the CDI, the parliamentary bishops claimed a place outside of the regular party-political dynamic. The institution of the ‘Lords Spiritual’ was the product of a distinct and peculiar history, as a result of which, it was claimed, they were impervious to the pernicious external influences which affected – even directed – the political judgements of the peers and the parties. Such an influence on British politics and parliamentary process, particularly at times of heightened party-political discord, was unique and essential.<sup>44</sup>

Most prominently, they denied that the bishops acted in parliament to secure or advance the institutional interests of the established Church. These claims were particularly pointed during debates on education. In an earlier period, the Church of England had, of course, been instrumental in the establishment and provision of education facilities. Its role in education had come to encapsulate not only the established Church’s particular responsibility and contribution to the nation, but the social benefits that derived from an effective partnership between the Church and state. Accordingly, during the debates on the Education Bill of 1906, Davidson cited the bishops’ responsibility to intervene; ‘a responsibility which they were not only

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<sup>43</sup> *HL Deb.* 13, c. 547, 28 Jan. 1913.

<sup>44</sup> For additional context on this deeply conservative formulation of British constitutional relations, see John Wolfe, *God and Greater Britain: religion and national life in Britain and Ireland, 1843-1945* (London, 1994), ch. 6.

able and willing, but absolutely bound, to discharge for the good of the nation as a whole'. In a plural society in which numerous niche groups might jockey for influence, Davidson suggested, only an established Church could be relied upon to act, not out of self-interest, but on the interests of those of the nation for whom it was responsible.<sup>45</sup>

When the question of the disestablishment of the Welsh Church finally reached the House of Lords in 1913, the Lords Spiritual similarly claimed that their interest was simply to defend the disfranchised and dispossessed. The vagaries of the electoral system, it was contended, had allowed radicals to secure an unrepresentative parliamentary majority in the principality – as Davidson noted in 1912, a parliamentary majority did not necessarily correlate with the scale of the returns at the ballot box.<sup>46</sup> Extremists were pursuing a sectional agenda in parliament under the guise of a 'democratic mandate', caring only for their dogma and not for the social – and indeed spiritual – welfare of the Welsh people.<sup>47</sup> Davidson instanced the universal parish system, which had provided access to spiritual facilities and social support for the entire community. It would, he claimed, be lost forever if the extremists got their way.<sup>48</sup> 'I do believe', he declared, 'that only after that [the dissolution of the parish system] had been done for some years would the people find out how great the difference was that had been made, and how vital was the loss

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<sup>45</sup> *Parl. Deb.* 162, c. 923, 1 Aug. 1906.

<sup>46</sup> R.T. Davidson, *The character and call of the Church of England: a charge delivered at his second visitation of the diocese of Canterbury in February, 1912* (London, 1912), pp. 90-1.

<sup>47</sup> On this basis, several bishops contributed to the debate on the 1910 Census (Great Britain) Bill to insist upon the inclusion of a voluntary survey of religious affiliation. The object was clear: to demonstrate the demographic, if not the parliamentary, strength of Anglicanism in Wales. *HL Deb.* 6, 12 Jul. 1910, cc. 66-96. See also, R.T. Davidson, *Disestablishment: issues at stake. A speech by the Archbishop of Canterbury at the eleventh annual meeting of the Church Committee* (London, 1907).

<sup>48</sup> Davidson, *Character and call*, pp. 92-5.

which they had sustained in their homes and in their religious life'.<sup>49</sup> The Lords Spiritual's opposition to disestablishment, it was argued, was no jealous rearguard defence of patrician privilege, but rather a necessary and self-sacrificing corrective to the tyrannies resulting from the electoral system.

More prominently still during the fractious constitutional debates after 1905, the bishops claimed to be disinterested in the party-political contest. When questions 'of sheer or mere Party politics were before the House', Davidson told the peers in 1911, 'I retain the view I have always expressed that the less the Bishops take part in the clash of arms upon such topics the better'.<sup>50</sup> That was not to say that the bishops did not have a role in constitutional matters when they became politically fraught – quite the opposite, they were indispensable. The point Davidson was making was that bishops were not subject to the same pressures – electoral, commercial, ideological, and so on – which influenced the views of other members of the House. Therein lay the value of the religious establishment. Davidson related as much to the peers in commenting in 1909 that the tendency for Lords Spiritual to '[hold] themselves free from the ties of what is ordinarily known as Party allegiance' was the basis of their value to the House.<sup>51</sup>

The interests the Lords Spiritual claimed to represent were not those of narrow institutional advantage, ideological belief, or even straightforward party preference. These were influences which (seemingly legitimately) acted upon other

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<sup>49</sup> *HL Deb.* 13, cc. 1134-5, 12 Feb. 1913. See also the comments of the Bishops of St. David's, John Owen, the following day. Owen had pored over the election addresses of English Liberal candidates during the December 1910 election, and found that only four had referred to the disestablishment of the Welsh dioceses. He demanded that an issue of such gravity be put before the electors before being carried into law. *HL Deb.* 13, cc. 1250-1, 13 Feb. 1913. See also Harri Williams, 'St. David's and disestablishment: reassessing the role of Bishop John Owen', in William Gibson (ed.), *Religion and society in the diocese of St. David's* (Farnham, 2015), pp. 193-4.

<sup>50</sup> *HL Deb.* 8, cc. 754-5, 24 May 1911.

<sup>51</sup> *HL Deb.* 4, cc. 925-1020, 24 Nov. 1909.

elements of the parliamentary process. The influence of the Lords Spiritual was the product of the unique circumstances of the religious establishment; they were concerned only with fidelity to national principles, the preservation and promotion of social welfare, and the harmonious conduct of national life. They claimed the capability to determine the objective ‘national interest’, articulating it to the country, imparting it to peers, and pursuing it vigorously through their participation in the House of Lords.

At times of acute party-political conflict, the bishops positioned themselves as the promoters of unity and facilitators of dialogue and compromise. Davidson was particularly prominent in this regard. The Archbishop of Canterbury was, of course, able to personify the role of the Church as no other bishop could. His office also remained deeply integrated with the professional and social existence of the political elite – not least as a privy councillor, with ready access to the brokers of political power. Davidson’s rise in particular had relied on his capacity to accrue influence in the informal corridors of power, whether through securing the patronage of the monarch or the access he had gained to public figures through his regular attendance at the Athenaeum and House of Lords.<sup>52</sup>

With access to the political elite, and yet not of it, Davidson was able to position himself as a bi-partisan broker of dialogue and reconciliation. During the 1909-1911 constitutional crisis, for example, he was highly active behind the scenes acting as a confidante and ‘go-between’ for the monarch, ministers and opposition leaders, seeking a resolution which would preserve the political independence of the

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<sup>52</sup> Melanie Barber, ‘Randall Davidson: a partial retrospective’, in Melanie Barber and Stephen Taylor (eds.) *From Cranmer to Davidson: a miscellany*, Church of England Record Society 7 (Woodbridge, 1999), pp. 387-438; Bell, *Davidson*, I, pp. 318-19; Stuart Mews, ‘Davidson, Randall Thomas (1848-1930)’, ODNB.

monarchy.<sup>53</sup> Similarly, during debates on the threatened coal strike of 1912, he reminded the members of the House that they were ‘bound to make an appeal to the conscience, I would say to the Christian conscience, of those who are concerned’. He bid the combatant parties to recognise ‘that the interests of the community are, after all, supreme, and that that means chiefly at this time the interests of its poorest and weakest members’.<sup>54</sup>

The bishops’ claim that their concern was only for the ‘national interest’ was, from a particular conservative standpoint, highly persuasive. It was a rhetorical contrivance designed to reconcile the notion of religious establishment – with all the institutional privileges it entailed – to the increasingly democratic and plural national discourse. Yet from a party-political standpoint, the bishops’ rhetoric often sat uneasily alongside their parliamentary conduct. Inducements to unity in the name of the ‘national interest’ disguised – often thinly – a preference for civic, economic, political, and social inertia. The ‘national interest’, the reasoning went, was best served by the existing constitutional settlement, including the Church’s role in the institutions of the state; it should therefore be defended as far as possible.

As the constitutional crises unfolded then, the bishops’ stance left them exposed to accusations of party-political preference and institutional self-interest. Consider, for example, the passage of the 1911 Parliament Bill. Davidson made an appeal for compromise ‘to both sides at the moment of great Constitutional difficulty’, citing his concern to use his position in the House ‘to further what is true and peaceable and for the common good’. However, it was manifest that Davidson’s

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<sup>53</sup> Barber, ‘Randall Davidson’, pp. 398-9; Derek Blakeley, ‘The Archbishop of Canterbury, the episcopal bench, and the passage of the 1911 Parliament Act’, *Parliamentary history* 27 (2008), pp. 145-6; Michael Hughes, ‘Archbishop Davidson, the “Edwardian Crisis”, and the defence of the national church’, *Journal of Church and state* 57 (2015), p. 19.

<sup>54</sup> *HL Deb.* 11, c. 701, 27 Mar. 1912.



sympathies lay decidedly on one side of the political divide. Those at fault were not the Unionist peers who had overturned constitutional precedent in rejecting the 1909 Finance bill. Quite the reverse: Davidson claimed that ‘all concession in this controversy has emanated from one side’, that of the Unionist peers.<sup>55</sup> Since 1909, they had put forward proposals to divest themselves of responsibility for ‘money bills’ and to replace their absolute veto with an effective veto by means of joint sessions of the Houses or referenda. His appeal for compromise was, in fact, a call for the Liberal government to accept compromise on the Unionist peers’ terms. Plainly, Davidson’s concern was not that the abuse of the upper chamber’s power should be constrained, but that it should ultimately retain mechanisms by which it could derail legislation. In this way, its function in the balance of parliamentary forces could be preserved, and the religious establishment in Wales guaranteed.

The disjuncture between the bishops’ rhetoric and their intentions made organisation of the bishops’ parliamentary bench a particularly complex activity. Some orchestration was clearly necessary to ensure that Church interests were sufficiently represented. Yet too strong a showing would only confirm the Liberal and nonconformist accusations. While studiously reporting the bishops’ voting record in the nineteenth century, Clayton cautioned those who supposed that the Lords Spiritual no longer acted in concert with ‘the solid majority of change-resisting peers’. Their conduct was not a matter of ‘ancient history’;

[i]t is just because by their votes and speeches the Bishops as legislators stand as their predecessors did in opposition to the expressed will of the people, that this record may be pondered.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> *HL Deb.* 8, c. 759, 24 May 1911.

<sup>56</sup> Clayton, *Bishops as legislators*, p. 16.

Certainly, Davidson was aware of the expectation in Liberal and nonconformist quarters – eager anticipation, even – for the parliamentary bishops to ‘close ranks’ in defence of their privilege. Accordingly, ever mindful of matters of presentation, he was careful to disclaim publicly any role in directing the bishops’ bench – and, indeed, a measure of latitude was apparent in the bishops’ voting. Even on an issue of such existential importance as the disestablishment of the Church of Wales, two Lords Spiritual – John Percival of Hereford and Charles Gore of Oxford – were free to vote in its favour.<sup>57</sup>

However, Davidson’s informal influence in directing the Lords Spiritual, especially on matters of ecclesiastical importance, was strong. His authority was based in the first place on the charisma of his office, though it was significantly enhanced by his widely acknowledged parliamentary experience, the product of a lengthy and intimate association with parliamentarians and parliamentary matters. After all, his attendance in the House, and by extension his membership of the wider elite social networks to which it provided access, far surpassed that of any other member of the bench. In the ten years to 1914, he accounted for 40 *per cent* of all episcopal contributions in the House.

Empowered by his familiarity with the intricacies of the political process, Davidson applied a subtle suasion over the bench. This became especially apparent during the crucial division on the Parliament Bill in August 1911. Before this, it had seemed clear that many of the bishops intended to abstain – indeed, a fortnight

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<sup>57</sup> Percival and Gore expressed their commitment to constitutional democracy – that is to say, they acknowledged the demands of the majority of Welsh MPs for disestablishment – and, Gore in particular, emphasised the spiritual and ecclesiastical advantages of freedom from the state. *HL Deb.* 13, cc. 1109-17, 1193-204, 12 Feb. 1913. See also G.L. Prestige, *The life of Charles Gore* (London, 1935), esp. pp. 352-65; William Temple, *Life of Bishop Percival* (London, 1921), esp. pp. 118-23, 244-7.

before the crucial vote, only three bishops had committed themselves unequivocally to support the bill with their votes.<sup>58</sup> However, Davidson feared that the mass creation of Liberal peers which the government threatened if the bill was rejected would render the passage of Welsh disestablishment an inevitability. Recognising that the vote might turn on a handful of votes, in an uncharacteristically concise, even morose speech, he indicated to the bishops, as much as the peers, his intention to vote with the government.<sup>59</sup> Fourteen bishops followed him into the government lobby; his intervention had arguably adjusted the balance of forces in the House of Lords in favour of the bill's passage.<sup>60</sup>

The Parliament Act implied a significant alteration in the balance of power between the two Houses. Crucially, the Lords' veto over public bills was replaced by the power to delay them for up to two years. In a sense, the passage of the Act marked the victory of the electoral mandate over assumed patrician authority.<sup>61</sup> Despite this, and despite the risks inherent in attempting to obstruct further the Liberal government's programme, the House retained an important function in Church defence. Powers of delay were not in and of themselves insubstantial – in fact, by codifying the relationship between the Houses, the Lords' use of their powers could, potentially, be more assured than before.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Although six others had expressed their willingness to consider voting for the bill, if necessary, to prevent a mass creation of Liberal peers. See the bishops' letters to Davidson, DP 12/271-301; Blakeley, 'Archbishop of Canterbury', p. 153.

<sup>59</sup> *HL Deb.* 9, c. 1059, 10 Aug. 1911.

<sup>60</sup> Lords Spiritual who voted in favour of the Bill: Randall Davidson (Canterbury); Cosmo Lang (York); George Kennion (Bath and Wells); Charles Gore (Birmingham); John Diggle (Carlisle); Francis Jayne (Chester); John Percival (Hereford); Augustus Legge (Lichfield); Williams Boyd-Carpenter (Ripon); Alfred Edwards (St. Asaph); Edwyn Hoskyns (Southwell); George Rodney Eden (Wakefield).

Lords Spiritual who voted against the Bill: Watkin Williams (Bangor); Huyshe Yeatman-Biggs (Worcester).

<sup>61</sup> David Cannadine, *The decline and fall of the British aristocracy* (London, 1990), p. 493.

<sup>62</sup> See Andrew Adonis, *Making aristocracy work: the peerage and the political system in Britain 1884-1914* (Oxford, 1993), p. 158; Chris Ballinger, 'Hedging and ditching: the Parliament Act 1911', *Parliamentary history* 30 (2011), p. 29.

Bishops leading the public campaign against Welsh disestablishment, notably John Owen of St. David's, sought to use the House's powers of delay to afford time for mass public demonstrations to shake the government's resolve, or even to cause its collapse (if the 'Irish question' did not cause it first). In just the first three months of 1912, Owen spoke at over forty meetings across England, the largest drawing up to 50,000 people.<sup>63</sup> 'I have been firmly persuaded', he told a public meeting in south Wales in 1913, 'that, within the two years allowed under the Parliament Act, the force of Church opinion in England would astonish the Government and prevent them from carrying [Welsh disestablishment] through its final stages'.<sup>64</sup> The House of Lords was well integrated into Owen's campaign to overawe the government. From its platform, he spoke to a national audience, affirming the Church's intention to brook no compromise; it intended to fight on till the end.<sup>65</sup>

Owen's belligerence contrasted with Davidson's caution. Concerned to position himself as the broker of compromise, he steered clear of the obstinate tones which could more legitimately come from the Welsh bishops. Still, his tacit support for Owen's tactics is evident. He refused to support openly those Liberal MPs, like William Glynne Gladstone, who sought to mollify churchmen by proposing a reduction in the extent of the proposed disendowment. Demonstration of any such support, Davidson informed Gladstone, 'would certainly be misunderstood as implying that I had reached the stage of desiring to compromise'. Any indication that the Church's leaders had resigned themselves to the inevitable would sap the resolve of the many thousands of people still involved in petitioning and public protests.

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<sup>63</sup> Owen, *Later life of Owen*, p. 166.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 197.

<sup>65</sup> See for more on Owen's arguments in favour of continued establishment (and indeed, endowment), Williams, 'St. David's', pp. 179-202.

Still, mindful to preserve his reputation for even-handedness, Davidson noted ‘how cordially I for one appreciate the efforts that you have been making to securing more reasonable arrangements than the Bill provides’.<sup>66</sup>

Even as the Lords reached the limit of their powers of delay, the House continued to offer opportunity for Church defence. Owen’s suggestion that the question of disestablishment be delayed further by its referral to a select committee was one which gained particular traction.<sup>67</sup> He was certainly confident in his ability to secure the support of the Unionist leadership for such a move, while St. Aldwyn pursued the idea with some vigour.<sup>68</sup> The committee’s terms of reference – which chiefly concerned the extent of parliament’s legal authority to partition the Canterbury Convocation through disestablishment of the Church’s Welsh dioceses – were intentionally widely drawn. Indeed, Owen expressed concern that they might not be ‘wide enough to occupy the time’ should the government outlast the session.<sup>69</sup>

Davidson was, again, reticent lest the Church leadership be publicly associated with such an obviously partisan move. He refused either to introduce the motion himself or to chair the committee, and argued against the inclusion of a bishop among the committee’s members.<sup>70</sup> Nevertheless, partly out of a desire not to perturb Owen or the Church’s Unionist supporters in parliament, he offered his tacit

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<sup>66</sup> Davidson to Gladstone, 8 Jan. 1913, DP 509/224. Davidson’s hesitancy backfired in this instance, when Gladstone dropped the amendment ‘in view of the conciliatory attitude of the Church leaders’: Owen, *Later life of Owen*, pp. 199-200.

<sup>67</sup> Owen to Davidson, 16 Jun. 1914, DP 511/101-2.

<sup>68</sup> St. Aldwyn to Davidson, undated (late June 1914), DP 511/103-4.

<sup>69</sup> Owen to Davidson, 19 Jun. 1914, DP 511/112-16.

<sup>70</sup> Davidson memo., undated (late June, 1914), DP 511/105-6. It was eventually decided that St. Aldwyn should chair the committee as someone informed of both ecclesiastical and parliamentary procedure.

support for the initiative. He assisted in the drafting of the motion, the discussion of parliamentary tactics, and the securing of witnesses.<sup>71</sup>

In these matters of constitutional importance, the bishops' agency in the House was curtailed by the tension between the rhetorical presentation of their role for political purposes, and the desired ecclesiastical and constitutional effect of their interventions. These were difficulties bred of the peculiar intersection of the party-political conflict with matters of direct, institutional Church interest. However, the effect of the Lords Spiritual's identification of themselves as constitutional guarantors extended beyond the high-profile constitutional clashes of the time. In fact, in some cases it placed them in apparent opposition to their erstwhile Unionist allies, and even risked alienating churchmen.

This was particularly the case on matters relating to the conduct of the nation's foreign affairs and the governance of the empire. The Church, of course, had a unique role in the imperial framework. Its missionary work had often preceded – and had sometimes acted at the pretext for – the imposition of formal British rule. In the House, the bishops acted to ensure that the principles which, they supposed, underpinned and necessitated British intervention were adhered to: the imposition of effective and just government, and a concern for the 'betterment' of indigenous peoples.

The Archbishop of Canterbury assumed a particular responsibility to intervene. From 1904 to 1914, one in every ten of the Lords Spiritual's parliamentary interventions concerned matters of foreign or imperial affairs.

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<sup>71</sup> Ibid; Owen to St. Aldwyn, 19 Jun. 1914, DP 511/112-16; Davidson to Lang, 20 Jun. 1914, DP 511/120-1; Davidson to Dibden, 26 Jun. 1914, DP 511/125-6; Davidson to Henson, 2 Jul. 1914, DP 511/146.

Davidson alone accounted for half of these, a proportion which increased further during the First World War. As the chief ecclesiastic of the worldwide Anglican Communion, the primate not only served as a central ‘pivot’ (to use Davidson’s own terminology) around which action was coordinated, but also bore direct responsibility for numerous overseas dioceses and missions.<sup>72</sup> This ecclesiastical network was augmented by Davidson’s own extensive contacts amongst senior colonial administrators.<sup>73</sup> He was therefore particularly well placed to speak with authority in the House on matters relating to the workings of colonial government. In 1905, for example, he introduced a debate on the Roth report on the treatment of aboriginals in Western Australia, even though he had no personal involvement in the issue. He was, however, associated with the Bishop of Perth who had raised the initial concerns. Davidson acknowledged the work of the colonial authorities which had conducted the investigation, but emphasised that the report revealed the failure of the British ‘gift’ for good government, and thereby their ‘civilising’ stewardship of the aboriginal peoples, in parts of Western Australia. He particularly instanced the apparent collusion of colonial authorities in slavery, and, with greater emphasis still, the arbitrary and corrupt operation of the justice system. The ‘principles’ that Davidson was concerned with above all were not abstract moral matters, but those of national character.<sup>74</sup>

The importance of the bishops’ identification with the processes and supposed purpose of British imperialism was further suggested by the fact that they

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<sup>72</sup> R.T. Davidson, *The Christian opportunity: being sermons and speeches delivered in America* (London, 1904), p. 46.

<sup>73</sup> For example, Davidson corresponded with the High Commissioner for South Africa and governor of the Transvaal and Orange River colonies, 2nd Earl of Selborne, concerning the abuse of Chinese labour in the region. Selborne to Davidson, 2 Nov. 1906, Selb. 2 88/62-4.

<sup>74</sup> *Parl. Deb.* 145, cc. 1298-321, 9 May 1905; *Report of the Royal Commission on the condition of the natives* (Perth, 1905).

made far fewer contributions in the House to international matters outside of the scope of the empire. However, when such contributions were made, they were again placed in the context of national reputation. Consider Bishop Talbot of Rochester's interventions on the government's response, or rather lack of response, to the conflict in Macedonia in 1905. Talbot did not use his parliamentary platform to emphasise the suffering of the local population, but rather to press the government to intervene for 'the self-respect of this country'. The nation had a tradition of principled interventionism, yet, although the government had undertaken to respond to the crisis, it had vacillated. He urged action to restore the integrity of, and fidelity to, the nation's principles.<sup>75</sup>

With the outbreak of war in August 1914, and as the search for expedencies which might bring it to a victorious conclusion grew in urgency, the Lords Spiritual's function in holding parliament to a supposed standard of national conduct became increasingly prominent. One-third of all episcopal contributions from 1914 to 1918 concerned either the prosecution of the war or other foreign and imperial affairs. The bishops' concern to defend the nation's 'principles' brought them not infrequently into conflict with the popular and parliamentary mood, and indeed that within the Church itself. This was most clearly the case in Davidson's frequent interventions in the House against a policy of reprisals. In 1915, he warned the peers – indeed the nation – not to be provoked into retaliation by the reports of the poor treatment of British prisoners of war in Germany.

To my mind nothing could be more contrary to the honourable traditions of English history or more foreign to the principles which should actuate us in matters of this kind, principles both of religion and of civilisation generally.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> *Parl. Deb.* 143, c. 1330-5, 28 Mar. 1905.

<sup>76</sup> *HL Deb.* 18, c. 756, 15 Mar. 1915.



To respond in kind, and thereby debase the nation's moral foundation, 'would be the worst misfortune that the war could bring upon us'.<sup>77</sup>

Similar concerns were evident in the bishops' approach to the issue of conscientious objection. It goes without saying that no bishop actively supported the pacifist cause. Even Gore, a man unafraid of advocating the unorthodox, referred to objectors as 'among the most aggravating human beings with whom I have ever had to deal'.<sup>78</sup> Yet the Lords Spiritual defended the right of individuals to freedom of conscience, and sought to ensure that those accused were subject to a just process, were permitted access to appeal and, if found guilty, were subjected to punishment which was neither arbitrary, harsh nor cruel.<sup>79</sup>

There were resonances once again with the bishops' appeals for national unity. Having decried the character of objectors, Gore went on to suggest that their poor treatment had undermined national cohesion, 'permanently embitter[ing]' some of the leading liberals and progressives in the country.<sup>80</sup> So consistent were the Lords Spiritual's interventions on behalf of conscientious objectors that Davidson claimed in 1919 (though with a little exaggeration) that he had 'trespassed' in every debate on the subject.<sup>81</sup>

Much less prominent than the bishops' involvement in matters of constitutional reform and foreign policy was their engagement in social matters. Of

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<sup>77</sup> Ibid, cc. 756-7. This was a recurring theme of Davidson's during the war, not just in relation to prisoners of war, but also aerial bombing, the targeting of civilian shipping, and the use of poison gas. He pursued these issues regularly through the House of Lords, in Convocation, and in private correspondence with politicians and government departments. See Bell, *Davidson*, II, pp. 756-60, 777-8, 831-8.

<sup>78</sup> *HL Deb.* 29, c. 904, 30 Apr. 1918. For a succinct appraisal of Gore, see Alan Wilkinson, 'Gore, Charles (1853-1932)', ODNB.

<sup>79</sup> See Davidson's contribution to debate, *HL Deb.* 22, cc. 480-92, 29 Jun. 1916.

<sup>80</sup> *HL Deb.* 29, cc. 903-5, 30 Apr. 1918.

<sup>81</sup> *HL Deb.* 34, cc. 165-7, 3 Apr. 1919.

course, the advent of Liberal government in 1905 ushered in not only a period of great constitutional turbulence, but also advances in social legislation. Over the course of six years, parliament passed the Education (Provision of Meals) Act (1906), Unemployed Workmen Act (1907), Education (Administrative Provisions) Act (1907), the Old Age Pensions Act (1908), the Labour Exchanges Act (1909) and the National Insurance Act (1911); the conceptual and legislative foundations of the post-Second World War welfare state were laid. However, the significance of these reforms was not necessarily apparent to contemporaries. Active government intervention in economic and social matters was a novelty, and in that respect controversial. Yet these matters were politically rather incidental, certainly in comparison to the great constitutional questions which defined the party identities.

It is a testament to the Lords Spiritual's sense of their crucial influence in central political matters of the constitution that, while they generally welcomed the Liberal social reforms, they were little involved in their parliamentary passage. The Old Age Pensions Bill drew just one Lord Spiritual – Davidson – to the House.<sup>82</sup> Three years later, he was joined only by Watkin Williams of Bangor in support of the National Insurance Bill.<sup>83</sup> In the case of this measure, Davidson suggested insufficient time had been provided for the Lords, bishops included, to engage fully with the legislative process. The House had received only a few hours' notice of the committee stage, though the bill consisted of 115 clauses and eight schedules and extended to 140 printed pages.<sup>84</sup> Davidson's comments addressed matters of procedure; he made no excuse for the absence of Lords Spiritual, and nor was he pressed on this by the peers.

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<sup>82</sup> *Parl. Deb.* 192, cc. 1360-9, 20 Jul. 1908.

<sup>83</sup> *HL Deb.* 10, cc. 797-9, 11 Dec. 1911; *HL Deb.* 10, cc. 991-4, 1019, 1062, 1082, 14 Dec. 1911.

<sup>84</sup> *HL Deb.* 10, cc. 991-3, 14 Dec. 1911.

In matters of state intervention in social problems, the bishops neither sought, nor were expected to bear a significant burden of the House's work. Yet in his Charge of 1899 as Bishop of Winchester, Davidson had expressed his belief that the Lords Spiritual should expect to involve themselves in matters 'which concern the social and moral health of our citizens and their children'. They were, he argued, entrusted with a place in parliament

not only for what are technically called Ecclesiastical questions, but for whatever things directly concern the moral life and the social well-being of the English people.<sup>85</sup>

Davidson's comments were not entirely without foundation. However, clearly the bishops did not display an overly great interest in the state's early interventions in matters of social concern. Rather, their stance in the House was suggestive of an older-style liberal belief in the centrality of individual moral responsibility as the basis for social improvement. Their interventions focused intensely on questions of personal moral conduct, and not on those of the state's role in welfare provision.

These concerns largely revolved around the issues of gambling, and the linked issues of alcohol licensing and temperance. In all, interventions in these matters accounted for one in every five episcopal contributions from 1904 to 1914. Significant episcopal attention was devoted to the Street Betting Bill (1904), Gambling Inducements Bill (1912) and Gambling Advertisements Bill (1912). The 1904 Licensing Bill alone drew twenty-one contributions from eight bishops. So active were the Lords Spiritual that in just five years as the century turned, Davidson

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<sup>85</sup> Quoted in Bell, *Davidson*, I, p. 318.

introduced five licensing bills. Two of these reached the statute book in the form of the 1902 Licensing Act.<sup>86</sup>

In claiming authority to engage in these issues, the bishops again emphasised their unique position in the parliamentary order. As in constitutional matters, they vaunted their freedom from party interest. Percival of Hereford noted that the Lords Spiritual were uniquely able to approach the question of licensing legislation ‘from the point of view of ... natural equity and the welfare of the masses’ as they had lived a great part of their lives ‘outside the highly refracting atmosphere of political Parties’.<sup>87</sup> In these ‘moral’ matters, however, political disinterestedness blended with the bishops’ imperviousness to the large, well-financed commercial influence in the House. ‘[S]ome of us’, Percival continued, ‘approach the question simply from what I may call the moral point of view’, while others approached it

from the habits and the circumstances of their lives, especially those who are engaged in Parliamentary life, approach the question mainly from the point of view of property.<sup>88</sup>

In applying a corrective influence to the debate, Davidson encouraged the peers to question the nature of the support for, and opposition to, reform. They should reflect, he suggested, on the views expressed by the ‘men and women throughout the country who are engaged ... day by day’ in facing the problem of excessive drink, and who supported the proposed reforms.<sup>89</sup> Conversely, couching his words cautiously for respectability’s sake, he noted ‘the permanent vested interests’ which sought to frustrate progress. The opposition to the bill had been

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<sup>86</sup> Bell, *Davidson*, I, pp. 322-6.

<sup>87</sup> *Parl. Deb.* 139, c. 491, 2 Aug. 1904. See also the comments of the Bishop of London in the same debate. *Ibid*, cc. 412-13.

<sup>88</sup> *Parl. Deb.* 139, c. 493, 2 Aug. 1904.

<sup>89</sup> *Parl. Deb.* 197, c. 539, 26 Nov. 1908.

intense, he continued, and doubtless in many cases had come from a position of concern. However,

if I am asked whether I think it is very widespread among those who are not personally financially interested in these matters, either directly or indirectly, I say I have not seen anything to convince me that it is.<sup>90</sup>

The Lords Spiritual's role presenting a corrective to the deleterious social effects of commerce, and the importance of personal 'moral' probity, also found expression in foreign and imperial affairs. In the early years of the century, the bishops made significant contributions to debates on the liquor traffic in Nigeria and East Africa. Through these interventions they sought to protect the peoples of the colonies – 'these ... children, these native races' – from those influences which, Davidson noted in 1905, 'had been found so absolutely degrading'.<sup>91</sup>

Perhaps more tellingly, during the debates on the abuse of Chinese workers in the Transvaal in 1904 and 1906, the bishops made only minor reference to the issue of indentured labour. In fact, some refused to concede that abuses had even occurred. Gore stated this explicitly: he had 'never taken any part in decrying the importation of Chinese labour on such grounds as the fear that they would be cruelly treated'. He dissociated himself from such charges, doubting 'that there was any bottom' to them.<sup>92</sup> Rather, the bishops' criticisms of the labour conditions concerned the 'moral degeneration' which had been promoted through the workers' contracts. The lack of clarity as to whether labourers' wives and children could join them in the Transvaal had, in Davidson's words, introduced 'a poison of a terrible kind' into the immigrant settlements.<sup>93</sup> The all-male communities had resulted, so the argument

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<sup>90</sup> Ibid, c. 542.

<sup>91</sup> *HL Deb.* 147, cc. 826-45, 6 Jun. 1905.

<sup>92</sup> *Parl. Deb.* 165, c. 44, 15 Nov. 1906.

<sup>93</sup> *Parl. Deb.* 129, c. 1004, 11 Feb. 1904.

went, in various forms of licentious behaviour (though no bishop was particularly specific in their claims). Percival noted with ‘all possible emphasis’ that ‘in the opinion of all Christian people it is herein lies the abomination of this business’.<sup>94</sup>

The bishops’ engagement in such issues nuanced, if not overturned, their relationship to political nonconformity. After all, the relative prominence of issues such as licensing and temperance can largely be accounted for by reference to the vitality of the ‘nonconformist conscience’. It is important to acknowledge the effect of ecumenical campaigning in making the case for various reforms.<sup>95</sup> The temperance societies of the various protestant churches – including that of the Church of England – had coordinated their efforts at securing legislation through the National Temperance Foundation since 1883. It was the combined efforts of the churches in the wake of the rejection of the 1895 Licensing Bill which had led to a parliamentary commission, and in turn paved the way for a new bill in 1908.<sup>96</sup>

The co-operation evident between Church and chapel on these issues complicated the portrayal of the Lords Spiritual by Liberal and Free Church polemicists as simple adjuncts of the Unionist party, and pillars of a broader conservative political and economic elite. Liberal peers such as Earl Spencer, who lamented the Church’s tendency to take up ‘so many political subjects’ alongside the Unionists, found themselves ‘rejoicing’ at the bishops’ independence on matters of personal morality.<sup>97</sup>

Nevertheless, editors of the nonconformist press continued in their efforts to suggest that the Lords Spiritual misused their privileged presence in parliament – or,

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<sup>94</sup> *Parl. Deb.* 160, c. 343, 6 Jul. 1906.

<sup>95</sup> Bebbington, *Nonconformist conscience*, pp. 46-50.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 50-1.

<sup>97</sup> *Parl. Deb.* 139, c. 399, 2 Aug. 1904.

at the very least, had their priorities skewed. Although twelve Lords Spiritual had voted in favour of the 1908 Licensing Bill, with five others pairing in favour of the second reading, editorials questioned the bishops' conduct. Much to the annoyance of *The British Weekly*, none of the four Welsh bishops registered a vote. Such was their irritation that they condemned the absence of the Bishop of Llandaff, even though he had not at that stage assumed a seat in the Lords.<sup>98</sup> *The Christian World*, notably more forthright in its language, questioned 'why the other Bishops did not attend?' After all, plenty were available when the questions of religious establishment were raised.<sup>99</sup>

Although the Lords Spiritual engaged in these issues as members of the House with a particular concern for personal morality, it is important to emphasise, as *The Christian World* suggested, that their activities in this respect were limited. It is an illuminating coincidence that as the issue of Chinese labour came to the fore in the House, the controversy on the 1906 Education Bill was in full swing. The contrast in the Lords Spiritual's conduct was palpable. Although Davidson had introduced a debate on Chinese labour on 15 November 1906, the reply of the Liberal peer Lord Coleridge's regretted the inaction of the bishops up to that point.

[I]n the contests which we have waged against this Ordinance for the last two years we have not had the open support of the most rev. Primate ... [I]f he had spoken the right word, and spoken it in time, the Chinamen would never have been imported, and these evils would never have arisen.<sup>100</sup>

With the debate slotted awkwardly between two much lengthier discussions of the Education Bill, *The Christian World* questioned 'all this daily zeal, this frantic effort,

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<sup>98</sup> *British Weekly*, 3 Dec. 1908.

<sup>99</sup> *Christian World*, 3 Dec. 1908.

<sup>100</sup> *Parl. Deb.* 165, cc. 42-3, 15 Nov. 1906.

when the Education Bill is before the House’ while the bishops’ benches were virtually vacant during the discussions on Chinese labour. The contrast between ‘the zeal of the prelates’ when their ‘craft [was] in danger’, and ‘their indifference’ on moral issues was ‘most marked’.<sup>101</sup>

The editor feigned confusion, but he had in fact set upon the fundamental truth of the Lords Spiritual’s role in the House: their function as moral leaders was secondary to their perceived constitutional significance. The bishops justified their presence in the House of Lords by reference to their history; the usefulness of their contemporary influence on British politics had been proven by their long continuity in the chamber. They were a distinct influence in the House; an ‘estate of the realm’, complementary to the other estates, but able to bring a unique influence to bear on the work of parliament. It was suggestive of a formulation of religious establishment in which the Church acted as an essential constitutional check – that is to say, it exerted an essentially conservative influence – on the political conduct of the affairs of the state. The bishops’ exertion of their influence in the House of Lords was essential if the Church’s responsibilities to the nation were to be discharged.

It was because of their distinct constitutional heritage that the bishops claimed to be immune to the partisan influences which acted on the regular party-political dynamic. Disinterested in such matters, they were able to define and pursue the objective ‘national interest’. In doing so, it did not matter that they could not claim the authority to speak on behalf of the established Church in Scotland, or indeed any of the other churches of the United Kingdom; in a sense, they did not need to. In speaking for the ‘national interest’ it was sufficient to note that the

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<sup>101</sup> *Christian World*, 22 Nov. 1906.



religious establishment in England and Wales was integral to the settled pact between the various components of British political and civic life upon which national success had historically been founded.

Despite this, and despite their claims of imperviousness, it was clear that party-political calculations had a strong influence on the parliamentary bishops' actions and rhetoric. As much as the House afforded opportunity to mount defence of the 'national interest', it also exposed the Church and its leaders to accusations of the abuse of privilege and, indeed, of hypocrisy. As the next chapter will demonstrate, this was never more pronounced than during the constitutional crisis of 1911.

## 2. Prelates, peers, and parties: the parliamentary bishops and the 1911 constitutional crisis

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The constitutional conflict which characterised the party-political division in this period came to a head from 1909 to 1911. In effectively setting the propertied interests of the Unionist peers against the popular social interest, Lloyd George's 1909 Finance bill – better known as the 'People's Budget' – augured, whether by design or not, a constitutional crisis in the relationship between the houses of parliament.

Following the rejection of the proposals in the House of Lords, the Liberals went to the polls in January 1910 calling for the budget and a reduction in the power of the House of Lords. With the support of the Irish Nationalists and the nascent Labour Party, the Liberal government was returned with a mandate 'to secure the undivided authority of the House of Commons over Finance and its predominance in Legislation'.<sup>1</sup> Should the intransigence of the Unionist peers make that impossible, Asquith as prime minister told the Commons that the government would force another dissolution and general election 'under such conditions as will secure that in the new Parliament the judgement of the people as expressed at the elections will be carried into law'.<sup>2</sup> 'Such conditions', it transpired, included securing from the king an undertaking to create Liberal peers *en masse* – perhaps as many as 500 – in order to counterbalance the large number of Unionists in the Lords and to ensure the passage of the reforms.

When it became known to Unionist leaders in late July 1911 that the king had acceded to Asquith's request, the party split. 'Ditchers' – as in 'to die in the last

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<sup>1</sup> *HC Deb.* 14, cc. 33-4, 21 Feb. 1910.

<sup>2</sup> *HC Deb.* 16, cc. 1547-51, 14 Apr. 1910.

ditch’ – led by Lord Halsbury, believed that the government could not possibly follow through with its bluster by dragging the nominally politically neutral monarch into a party dispute, and opposed any concession. ‘Hedgers’, including the leader of the Unionists in the House, Lord Lansdowne, feared their impotence should the Liberals be able to dominate both chambers. They advocated abstention, enabling the bill to pass but denying it the legitimacy of cross-party support; it could thus be repealed at a later date. Finally, there were the ‘Rats’ – otherwise known as the ‘Judas peers’. These were so concerned at the prospect of a Liberal-dominated parliament that they were willing to countenance voting with the government in support of the reduction of the powers of the House of Lords.<sup>3</sup>

The political factions among the peers were so evenly balanced that the Lords Spiritual became a potentially decisive group in the crisis; the result of the division on the bill, it seemed, might well turn on the inclinations of the twenty-six episcopal members of the House. The Church, through the Lords Spiritual, was to prove crucial in the resolution of this clash between the political parties, and in determining the character of the future relations between the two houses of parliament. Despite this, the influence of the parliamentary bishops has only recently been considered in depth by historians.<sup>4</sup> The bishops’ role in the constitutional crisis was characterised, it is contended, by their concern for the ‘national interest’. Though this term is not directly defined in the literature, it is taken to encompass their desire to promote

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<sup>3</sup> Chris Ballinger, ‘Hedging and ditching: the Parliament Act 1911’, *Parliamentary history* 30 (2011), pp. 19-32; Neal Blewett, *The peers, the parties and the people: the general elections of 1910* (London, 1972); Andrew Adonis, *Making aristocracy work: the peerage and the political system in Britain 1884-1914* (Oxford, 1993), ch. 6; John Fair, *British interparty conferences: a study of the procedure of conciliation in British politics, 1867-1921* (Oxford, 1980), ch. 4.

<sup>4</sup> Earlier scholarship on the 1909-1911 crisis tended to focus on intra-party dynamics. See for example, Roy Jenkins, *Mr. Balfour’s poodle: an account of the struggle between the House of Lords and the government of Mr. Asquith* (London, 1968); David Southern, ‘Lord Newton, the Conservative peers and the Parliament Act of 1911’, *English historical review* 96 (1981), pp. 834-40; P. Kelvin and C. Weston, ‘The “Judas group” and the Parliament Bill of 1911’, *English historical review* 99 (1984), pp. 551-63.

social unity and political harmony. In these accounts, the Lords Spiritual – Davidson in particular – sought to promote accommodation and facilitate compromise at times of political disunity. He acted as an ‘honest broker’, enabling the conflicting factions and parties to enter into negotiation and, potentially, reach a compromise.<sup>5</sup>

This was most obviously the case in his concern to prevent the institution of the monarchy from becoming entangled in the political dispute.<sup>6</sup> Davidson was able to assume such a role, it is argued, as the institutional interests of the Church were not directly implicated in the crisis. Further, although they had access to the leaders of the state, the bishops were not subject to the external influences – electoral, financial, ideological – which so polarised the political debate. The Lords Spiritual constituted a neutral third party to a conflict between parties and factions. Davidson was able to rise above his natural conservative sympathies and consider, coolly and with disinterest, the objective interests of the ‘nation’.<sup>7</sup>

Although at least one study recognises that such efforts amounted to a conscious attempt to respond to wider social and political change, failure to appreciate the broader context of the Lords Spiritual’s function in the House has skewed the analysis.<sup>8</sup> The *presentation* of parliamentary bishops’ role has been mistaken for their *effective* role.<sup>9</sup> As established in the previous chapter, the

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<sup>5</sup> Michael Hughes, ‘Archbishop Davidson, the “Edwardian Crisis”, and the defence of the national church’, *Journal of Church and state* 57 (2015), pp. 217-42; Derek Blakeley, ‘The Archbishop of Canterbury, the episcopal bench, and the passage of the 1911 Parliament Act’, *Parliamentary history* 27 (2008), pp. 141-54.

<sup>6</sup> Blakeley, ‘Archbishop of Canterbury’, pp. 145-6; Hughes, ‘Davidson’, p. 19.

<sup>7</sup> William Kuhn, *Democratic royalism: the transformation of the British monarchy, 1861-1914* (London, 1996), pp. 98-110; Adrian Hastings, *Church and state: the English experience* (Exeter, 1991), p. 31. See also Melanie Barber, ‘Randall Davidson: a partial retrospective’, in Stephen Taylor (ed.) *From Cranmer to Davidson: a Church of England miscellany*, Church of England Record Society 7 (Woodbridge, 1999), pp. 387-438; Blewett, *Peers, parties and people*, pp. 340-1; Sydney Dark, *Archbishop Davidson and the English Church* (London, 1929), esp. pp. 165-6.

<sup>8</sup> Hughes, ‘Davidson’, p. 13.

<sup>9</sup> Although William Kuhn suggested a dissonance between Davidson’s actions and rhetoric, he nevertheless attributed the archbishop’s *volte face* over the Parliament Bill to his concern for the institution of the monarchy. Kuhn, *Democratic royalism*, p. 108.

identification of the ‘national interest’ necessarily amounted to a statement of political values. Davidson’s use of the term implied a particular position: a preference for constitutional inertia. In the context of the Parliament Bill, this included the defence of a politically neutral monarchy. But it also extended to the preservation of an established Church.

The tension between this formulation, and the Church’s need to respond to the increasingly democratic and plural political discourse, complicated the Lords Spiritual’s function in the House; although the constitutional crisis heightened their political significance, their actions also exposed the Church to criticism from both without and within. Davidson shrewdly used his influence to try and secure an outcome to the constitutional crisis which was favourable to the ‘national interest’ – which, from his perspective, included the preservation of the religious establishment in Wales. However, nonconformist criticisms of the Church’s actions and the complexities of the political division demanded subtle calculation and rhetorical nuance from the bishops; symbolic gestures would not defend the Welsh Church in the long run. To those seeking unambiguous affirmation of the Church’s resistance to disestablishment, the Lords Spiritual offered little solace; the bishops were unable to act in a manner which unambiguously expressed their commitment to the religious establishment. Although they had a potentially crucial role in deciding the outcome of the crisis between – and indeed, within – the political parties, the implications of which would help to determine the future constitutional role of the House of Lords, the necessary nuance of their position complicated, even undermined, their leadership within the Church.

The suggestion that Church interests were, at best, ancillary to the constitutional crisis was seeded by Davidson’s early biographers. George Bell

reproduced Davidson's retort to those who suggested that the Church had been unwisely disengaged from the January 1910 election:

I honestly believe that we best serve the interests both of Church and Nation by abstaining from identifying ourselves vociferously with one side or the other in an acute political conflict wherein Church questions occupy really a subordinate place.<sup>10</sup>

Although recent historical accounts have taken Bell's account for granted, to contemporaries it was obvious that significant Church interests were implicated in the outcome of the constitutional crisis. Until 1911 at least, the House of Lords had acted as the ultimate guarantor that the demands of Liberal, nonconformist Welsh MPs for disestablishment would not be realised. Although disestablishment bills were introduced in the House of Commons in 1894, 1895 and 1909, none had progressed beyond their second reading. The certainty that the preponderance of Unionist peers – supported, of course, by the bishops – would use the House of Lords' power to veto any such legislation sapped the political will to persevere.<sup>11</sup>

However, under the Parliament Bill, introduced in February 1911, the House of Lords' veto over legislation would be abolished. Instead, the peers would have a power to delay public bills by up to two years. The ramifications of the realignment of the chambers were obvious. A Parliament Act would mean Irish Home Rule; it would mean education reform, and, for Church leaders above all, it would mean the

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<sup>10</sup> G.K.A. Bell, *Randall Davidson, Archbishop of Canterbury*, 2 vols. (London, 1935; 2nd edn. 1938), I, pp. 603-4.

<sup>11</sup> See, for more on these bills and the campaigns mounted by churchmen to defend the religious establishment in Wales, P.M.H. Bell, *Disestablishment in Ireland and Wales* (London, 1969), pp. 242-58; A.G. Edwards, *Memories by the Archbishop of Wales* (London, 1927), pp. 144-75; G.I.T. Machin, *Politics and the churches in Great Britain, 1869-1921* (Oxford, 1987), pp. 195-220; Kenneth Morgan, *Wales in British politics, 1868-1922* (Cardiff, 1991), *passim*; Barry Smith, 'Bishop Edwards of St. Asaph and disestablishment', *Transactions of the Denbighshire historical society* 59 (2011), pp. 195-200.

disestablishment, perhaps even the disendowment, of the Church in Wales.<sup>12</sup> No bishop doubted the significance of the Parliament Bill. Edwards of St. Asaph, the senior bishop of the Church in Wales, noted of the December 1910 election that ‘[t]he fate of the Church, as an endowed Church, will be decided within the next six or eight weeks’.<sup>13</sup>

The reaction of those bishops most prominent in the campaign against disestablishment – notably those holding Welsh dioceses – was perhaps unsurprising. They used their place in the House unapologetically to dilute the effect of the bill. For example, Owen strongly supported Lord Halifax’s amendments to the Parliament Bill which provided for a general election or referendum to be interposed before any bill which affected the religious establishment could pass into law.<sup>14</sup> The elections of 1910 had been fought primarily on the budget, tax and fiscal issues, and only secondarily on the powers of the House of Lords. The government’s mandate, so the argument went, hardly extended to disestablishment in Wales; least of all when the government depended on MPs, notably Irish and Labour, who had no direct stake in the issue, for its majority.<sup>15</sup> When the government refused to support Halifax’s amendment, Owen accused it of seeking to pass disestablishment ‘behind the backs of the people of this country’. His comments on the Parliament Bill were an inducement to those mobilising in England and Wales to protest and petition against disestablishment that the Church’s resolve would not be shaken; even if the

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<sup>12</sup> Philip Norton, ‘Resisting the inevitable? The Parliament Act 1911’, *Parliamentary history* 31 (2012), pp. 444-59.

<sup>13</sup> Eluned E. Owen, *The later life of Bishop Owen, a son of Wales* (Llandyssul, 1961), p. 144.

<sup>14</sup> *HL Deb.* 9, cc. 70-3, 3 Jul. 1911.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, cc. 77-81. The Bishop of St. Asaph also emphasised the changing feelings among nonconformists towards disestablishment and disendowment, such that renewed recourse to the electors was needed before any measure should pass. *HL Deb.* 9, cc. 86-8, 3 Jul. 1911.

House of Lords' power was reduced, the defence of the Welsh establishment was far from over.

Although Owen and the Welsh bishops more generally made a strong showing in the Lords in support of Halifax, the comparative absence of the English bishops, and in particular the Archbishop of Canterbury, was conspicuous. Only two Lords Spiritual from English dioceses voted in support of Lansdowne's later attempt to exempt disestablishment, among other issues of 'great gravity', from the operation of the bill. The Welsh bishops, it seems, were largely left to raise the cry for the Church in Wales.<sup>16</sup>

The relative absence of the English bishops was no happenstance. The party-political conflict was portrayed by Liberals as a clash between the 'democratic' force of the government, and the 'patrician' interests represented in the House of Lords; it provided ideal fodder for the nonconformist press to affirm its claims of the Church's role 'on the wrong side of history'. The House had been used – by Unionists and bishops alike; indeed, together – to defend their privileged access to the institutions of government, and thereby to perpetuate injustice. 'The present situation between the two Houses', *The Christian World* editorialised, 'is due more to the ARCHBISHOP OF CANTERBURY than to any other man'. It was Davidson who had set the second chamber 'on a course of error which has ended in its ruin'. In his pleas for compromise, they saw only an interposition between 'the people and the privileges of which he is the representative'. As soon as the Lords' veto was done away with, it continued, it would not be many years before the people of Britain

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<sup>16</sup> The bishops of Bangor, Peterborough, St. David's and Southwell voted in favour of Lansdowne's proposal. *HL Deb.* 9, cc. 279-80, 5 Jul. 1911.



would ‘take care’ of ‘the privileged position of the Church and of the Church’s schools’.<sup>17</sup>

The imperative for churchmen to contradict the conflation of the religious establishment with the party-political conflict over the powers of the parliamentary chambers was never greater than during the crisis of 1909-11. Davidson was certainly aware of the historic resonances with the earlier ‘democratic’ reforms. In the early 1830s, the Lords Spiritual had infamously attended the House in large numbers to oppose the expansion of the electoral franchise.<sup>18</sup> If the bishops’ involvement in the 1911 crisis could be spun to tie into the narrative of the Church’s opposition to the ‘natural’ progressive development of British civic and political rights, it surely would.<sup>19</sup>

The potency of such accusations was not lost on Davidson. As early as April 1910 he had taken the precaution of gathering information on the debates of the 1830s, in case he should have to ‘clarify’ the historical record.<sup>20</sup> When the issue of the disestablishment of the Welsh dioceses did finally come before the House of Lords in February 1913, he was certainly not reticent in affirming his commitment to the religious establishment.<sup>21</sup> However, during the constitutional crisis of 1909-11, he shrank from bringing the issue to the fore, lest it become conflated with the broader party conflict and political context. Far from being committed to some impossibly objective notion of ‘the national interest’, Davidson thought and acted in

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<sup>17</sup> *Christian World*, 1 Jun. 1911. See also, *British Weekly*, 17 Aug. 1911.

<sup>18</sup> 21 Lords Spiritual voted against the Whigs’ reform bill in 1831, and a further fifteen against that of 1832. Eric Evans, *Great Reform Act of 1832* (London, 1983), p. 54; Edward Hughes, ‘The bishops and reform, 1831-3: some fresh correspondence’, *English historical review* 56 (1941), pp. 459-90.

<sup>19</sup> Interestingly, the bishops’ conduct during the 1909-1911 constitutional crisis continued to be used to support an argument against their continued presence in parliament as recently as 2010. Iain McLean, ‘The bishops’ 1909 moment’, *Public policy research* (Dec. 2009 – Feb. 2010), pp. 232-4.

<sup>20</sup> Gilbert to Davidson, 20 Apr. 1910, DP 12/124-5.

<sup>21</sup> *HL Deb.* 13, c. 1142, 12 Feb. 1913.

a highly political manner. His intentions were not party-political as such, but they were nevertheless partisan.

In 1911, when he was approached by Lansdowne on the possibility of amending the Parliament Bill to exempt disestablishment from its operation, Davidson, unlike Owen or Edwards, replied starkly that he ‘did not think Disestablishment could be singled out for unique treatment’.<sup>22</sup> When he spoke to the amendments as eventually introduced by Lansdowne, he did so without explicitly mentioning disestablishment or disendowment. He claimed to have considered them ‘in a cold-blooded manner’, had seen their moderation and accordingly urged the government to support them.<sup>23</sup>

Davidson’s careful separation of Welsh disestablishment from the party-political constitutional issues raised by the Parliament Bill enabled him, despite the obvious inferences, to claim disinterestedness in the battle between the opposing majorities in the House of Lords and House of Commons. His calculations in this respect were nuanced and fluid, responding to the circumstances as the crisis progressed. Clearly, the Church’s interests were best served in the short term by the preservation of the status quo between the Houses. However, with the looming threat of 300, perhaps as many as 500, new Liberal peerages, it was equally clear that the status quo was no longer sustainable. At least under the provisions of the Parliament Bill, the Church would still have two years in which to stir electoral and parliamentary support for the Church. If both chambers were dominated by the Liberals, disestablishment in Wales could be carried as a matter of course, regardless of any public opposition mounted by churchmen.

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<sup>22</sup> Memo., undated (late June 1911), DP 12/191-7.

<sup>23</sup> *HL Deb.* 9, cc. 588-9, 20 Jul. 1911.

He was also concerned that in resolving the crisis neither the Church nor the Unionist Party should undermine their ability to oppose, or even overturn, the Liberals' reforms at some point in the future. He wrote to Newton, who believed at that time that mass creations should be prevented at all costs, suggesting that he was hesitant to support any amendments which might make the Parliament Bill less objectionable.

I do not scruple to say that to my mind the passage of the Bill, even as it stands, would be preferable to the creation of 300 peers and the consequent farcical ending of our old constitution. But if the House has to pass it, or acquiesce in it, let it be with as few attempts as possible to impose disabilities upon the Unionists of the future.<sup>24</sup>

Davidson knew that, for the sake of the Welsh Church, the Lords Spiritual could not oppose the Parliament Bill. Nor could they confer their authority on the reforms. He was left with one option: to support the Unionist abstentionists led by Lansdowne and Marquess Curzon, enabling the Liberals to pass the Bill with the least possible measure of parliamentary authority.

In pursuing this goal, Davidson and the other bishops did not act as the peers might. It was acknowledged that the Lords Spiritual were not, nor should they be, subject to the traditional structures of party-political organisation. Yet they had an important political role to play. It was in Davidson's careful management of the party politicians that he was able to advance the Church's interest. He fully recognised that, in the finely-balanced inter- and intra-party contest that was developing, the strongest political asset he possessed was information about the intentions of the bishops' bench. As such, from the point at which a crisis seemed

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<sup>24</sup> Davidson to Newton, 10 Jul. 1911, DP 280/314, 324-5 [underlining in original].

inevitable, he was careful not to risk undermining the uncertainty surrounding – or, indeed, the apparent political disinterestedness of – the actions of the Lords Spiritual.

Confidante and advisor to the king's court he may have been, but he shrank from assuming any role as a partisan for the monarchy. Asked by Lansdowne whether the king would consider calling on Balfour, the leader of the Unionists in the Commons, to form a government in the event of the resignation of the Liberal ministry, Davidson replied unambiguously that he 'had no authority to state the King's views as to that possibility'.<sup>25</sup> He carefully demarcated his personal role as an advisor to the king, and any political action the bishops might themselves take. As early as October 1909, the king's private secretary Lord Knollys attempted to induce the bishops' bench to act as the king desired. He impressed upon Davidson the king's keen desire for the Lords not to reject the budget, 'believing as he does that such action would strengthen the hands of those who are bent upon the general Socialistic policy'.<sup>26</sup> By the time the crisis had reached its most critical moments in the summer, the king and his secretaries became increasingly direct. Davidson recorded in early August 1911 that

[t]he King would like the Bishops\* if possible to vote for the Parliament Bill ... and wished to know whether I would undertake to do it myself and to induce other Bishops.<sup>27</sup>

Davidson was unequivocal: 'I replied, No, I could not make such a promise: I thought that on the whole the disadvantages of such action' – of tying the bench to a particular course – 'would outweigh the gains'.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Memo., undated (June 1911), DP 12/192.

<sup>26</sup> Memo., 28 Oct. 1909, DP 12/107-14.

\* Davidson referred to 'the Bishops', though he of course meant only those bishops and archbishops who were also Lords Spiritual.

<sup>27</sup> Memo., undated (August 1911), DP 12/219-40.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

As July turned to August, and the king's readiness to accede if necessary to the government's demands for mass creations became apparent, Davidson received similar approaches from the various political factions in the conflict. The right of the Lords Spiritual to intervene in a constitutional crisis, even one marked by such party-political loyalties as this, was not questioned. Yet, it was clear that the bishops could not be approached as regular peers. Political contact with the Lords Spiritual was conducted through the Archbishop of Canterbury, rather than on an individual basis. Such approaches attested not only to Davidson's personal familiarity with statesmen of various creeds,<sup>29</sup> but to the recognition of the archbishop's role as the appropriate nodal point between Church and state.

Curzon approached Davidson on 26 July. He had contacted 230 other peers, but had not considered it proper to approach the bishops directly. 'It has occurred to us', he continued, 'that perhaps it may be in your power to ascertain the intentions of the Bishops'. It was of 'vital importance' that Davidson let them know how many bishops intended to abstain, and how many intended to vote with the government.<sup>30</sup> Meanwhile, Lord Crewe, the Liberal Leader of the House, representing the government, arranged to meet the archbishop privately in order to establish, simply and exactly, 'What will the Bishops do?'<sup>31</sup>

It is significant that, although the politicians sought the bishops' opinions through Davidson, they did not seek to influence those opinions directly. It was recognised that the Lords Spiritual, though potentially important in the resolution of the crisis, were not to be drawn into the party-political dispute. In a constitutional

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<sup>29</sup> See Barber, 'Randall Davidson', *passim*; Stuart Mews, 'Davidson, Randall Thomas (1848-1930)', ODNB.

<sup>30</sup> Curzon to Davidson, 26 Jul. 1911, DP 12/211-3.

<sup>31</sup> Memo., undated (August 1911), DP 12/219-40.

sense, to do so would have been to deny – or at least, undermine – the sense of the bishops’ peculiar position in the House, distinct from the regular dynamics of the peers. Moreover, for Curzon and Lansdowne, it risked bringing the question of the religious establishment directly into the fray, with the likely effect of strengthening the ranks and stiffening the resolve of the ‘ditchers’. For the government, it risked raising the questions, not only of the upper chamber’s powers, but also its composition, further complicating the issue and risking a division among Liberals.

Though less exposed to direct party-political influences, the Lords Spiritual were however subjected to significant ecclesiastical pressure. Organised efforts to defend the religious establishment in Wales did not wait for the debates on the Parliament Bill to run their course; ‘the first year of the Defence’ began after the December 1910 general election.<sup>32</sup> The scale of the campaign mounted by the CDI has often been underestimated by accounts of the periods, but it was sizable. The organisation intervened at by-elections, arranged for mass petitioning, and sought to rouse public demonstrations at a scale not seen since the repeal of the Corn Laws. The ‘drum ecclesiastic’ beat not just in the communities of Wales, but in England as well, and even reached out to nonconformists.<sup>33</sup> The campaign absorbed the energies of great many churchmen and churchwomen, including many influential Anglican statesmen – Lord Robert Cecil,<sup>34</sup> Viscount St. Alwyn, the 2nd Earl of Selborne, and 4th Marquess of Salisbury, to name a notable few.<sup>35</sup> They had invested considerable

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<sup>32</sup> Owen, *Later life of Owen*, p. 145.

<sup>33</sup> Machin, *Politics and the churches*, pp. 305-10; Bell, *Davidson*, I, esp. pp. 640-4; Owen, *Later life of Owen*, esp. chs. 12-13.

<sup>34</sup> Cecil would eventually resign from the coalition government in November 1918 over the planned disestablishment of the Welsh dioceses after the war. He was ennobled as Viscount Cecil of Chelwood in December 1923. Martin Ceadel, ‘Cecil, (Edgar Algernon) Robert Gascoyne – [known as Lord Robert Cecil], Viscount Cecil of Chelwood (1864-1958)’, ODNB.

<sup>35</sup> See, for the popular campaign against disestablishment, Machin, *Politics and the churches*, esp. pp. 305 ff.

time and effort – and, indeed, money – into the defence of the religious establishment. Now that the issue appeared to be reaching its pivotal moment, they might rightly expect the parliament bishops to stand unambiguously by their side. It was perhaps unsurprising then that the only peers who attempted to influence the actions of the Lords Spiritual directly were those who were deeply involved in the life and defence of the Church.

Selborne and Salisbury, both members of the extended Cecil family, personified the apparent landed rearguard to democratic advance. They also exemplified the congruity between the institutions and persons of Church and state.<sup>36</sup> Unlike Curzon and Crewe, Selborne and Salisbury had no compunction about approaching the bishops as individuals, though Selborne acknowledged that influencing Davidson was ‘vastly more important as he leads others’.<sup>37</sup>

In early August 1911 Selborne and Salisbury fell prey to a rumour – one entirely unsubstantiated – that the bishops, concerned at the prospect of a mass creation of peers, intended to vote as a block with the government. The Lords Spiritual, the two peers believed, were planning to abandon the Church’s interests and rally instead to the aid of its enemies; neither, it seems, had much faith in the bishops’ ability to adjudicate between the ecclesiastically imperative, and the politically prudent.<sup>38</sup> Asquith could never possibly follow through with the unconstitutional mass creations he had threatened, so they reasoned; by voting with the government, the Lords Spiritual would only undermine Church defence and render disestablishment an inevitability. Salisbury and, especially, Selborne were

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<sup>36</sup> Adrian Hastings, *A history of English Christianity 1900-2000* (London, 2001), pp. 252-3.

<sup>37</sup> Salisbury to Selborne, 5 Aug. 1911, Selb. 2 6/106-9.

<sup>38</sup> For more on the attitudes of some of those in the Cecil family towards the role of the episcopate in national life, see chapter 4.

apoplectic. The thumb-screws needed to be applied: ‘Can we do anything more to put that straight? Can we frighten them?’<sup>39</sup> Salisbury warned Davidson what voting with the government meant:

It means to become responsible in a measure for the Parliament Bill which is designed to destroy the Establishment in Wales. It means bitterly to offend the most fighting elements in the Unionist Party – in Parliament but far more outside.<sup>40</sup>

Selborne was more dramatic still, disbelieving that the bishops could ever ‘come forward to help the professed enemies of the Church against those who are her most loyal and devoted sons’. If the Lords Spiritual voted ‘to save the Government and defeat their friends’, he continued, ‘I do not conceal from you that many of us will feel it deeply & bitterly’.<sup>41</sup> Neither desired to enlist the bishops as ‘ditchers’, but they were clear that the bishops should abstain from participation in the crisis. Association with any side – let alone actually voting with the government – risked drawing the Church openly into the party-political dispute, and thereby undermine efforts to defend the establishment. The bishops were, Selborne claimed, ‘men of peace’ who ‘ought to be far removed from Party conflict’.<sup>42</sup>

There was a broad recognition among the peers of the Lords Spiritual’s political significance. Yet they were not passive in the House. Davidson actively sought to use the bishops’ influence to work towards the Church’s goals. He used his position as the conduit to the Lords Spiritual to influence the outcome of the crisis in the Church’s favour – or rather, what he supposed to be the Church’s favour.

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<sup>39</sup> Quoted in Blakeley, ‘Archbishop of Canterbury’, p. 148.

<sup>40</sup> Salisbury to Davidson, 1 Aug. 1911, DP 12/233-8. Reproduced in Bell, *Davidson*, I, pp. 627-8.

<sup>41</sup> Selborne to Davidson, 5 Aug. 1911, DP 12/251-4.

<sup>42</sup> Salisbury to Davidson, 1 Aug. 1911, DP 12/233-8. See also, Selborne to Davidson, 5 Aug. 1911, DP 12/251-4.



Davidson passed information about the bishops' intentions only to the Unionist abstainers.

In late July, he wrote to all the Lords Spiritual asking them to write – if they felt so disposed – to Curzon 'stating what line you propose to take' so that they might 'help make the position clear'.<sup>43</sup> Reporting his actions to Curzon, Davidson suggested that no bishop was likely to join Halsbury's 'ditchers', and that presumably the Liberal bishops of Birmingham and Hereford would support the government whatever happened.<sup>44</sup> He not only speculated on the bishops' opinions, but also revealed information about voting intentions that he had obtained through strictly private correspondence. The evangelical Knox of Manchester had refused to participate in the head-counting, informing Davidson that 'I do not wish to be enumerated on either side & certainly would not have my name appear [on any list]'. He further noted that, while he did not expect to be in London during the debates, all his 'fighting instincts' were with the 'ditchers'.<sup>45</sup> Despite Knox's refusal to send information directly to Curzon, Davidson informed Curzon as a matter of course that

Manchester certainly will not ally himself with us. If he voted at all it would be the other way, but he will not I think do that. He has written to me about it.<sup>46</sup>

Twenty-three of the Lords Spiritual responded to Davidson's request, many responding as a matter of urgency by telegram or the midnight post. Such was the quality of the information that Davidson furnished, that Lansdowne was confidently able to calculate that there could be as many as ten episcopal votes to counter the

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<sup>43</sup> Davidson to Lords Spiritual, 24 Jul. 1911, DP 437/181.

<sup>44</sup> Davidson to Curzon, 27 Jul. 1911, Cur. Mss Eur. 89/33.

<sup>45</sup> Knox to Davidson, 28 Jul. 1911, DP 437/200-1.

<sup>46</sup> Davidson to Curzon, 27 Jul. 1911, Cur. Mss Eur. 89/33; Davidson to Curzon, 31 Jul. 1911, DP 437/216.

'ditchers'.<sup>47</sup> Conscious as ever to preserve his reputation for party-political disinterestedness, it is notable that, although in the memoranda which he preserved in his own papers as a record of the crisis Davidson recorded that Curzon had received letters from the bishops, he did not note his own role in soliciting the information.<sup>48</sup>

Davidson was far less forthcoming with members of the other factions. On receiving Crewe at Lambeth on 1 August, he had in his possession, by pure coincidence, the notes sent by the Lords Spiritual to Curzon explaining their positions. He chose, however, to provide Crewe with only an indication that no bishop was likely to vote with the 'Halsbury party', and suggested that some might vote with the government rather than abstain.<sup>49</sup> 'I refused absolutely', he recorded, 'to form an estimate how many these would be, or to promise that there would be any, and I pressed this point'.<sup>50</sup>

Implicit within Curzon's and Crewe's approaches, and explicit within Selborne's and Salisbury's, was the notion that Davidson could influence, perhaps even decisively direct, the members of the bishops' bench. Davidson was always careful to distance himself from such ideas. Demonstrable coordination of the bench would, after all, confirm the Liberals' perception of conspiracy. In correspondence with the factions he maintained the assertion that the 'Lords Spiritual' were politically disinterested and acted independently of ecclesiastical authority. To Selborne, he denied knowing what individual bishops would do, even though at the

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<sup>47</sup> Lansdowne to Cromer, 30 Jul. 1911, FO 633/34.

<sup>48</sup> Memo., undated (Aug. 1911), DP 12/219-42.

<sup>49</sup> In addition, that is, to the three Lords Spiritual who had already declared publicly that they would vote with the government; the bishops of Birmingham, Hereford, and Chester.

<sup>50</sup> Memo., undated (Aug. 1911), DP 12/230. Crewe's account of the meeting suggests that Davidson perhaps also provided him with the names of bishops likely to vote with, and against, the government. James Pope-Hennessy, *Lord Crewe, 1858-1945: the likeness of a Liberal* (London, 1955), pp. 125-6.

time of writing he had a good indication of this. He further emphasised that he had no desire to assume leadership of the bench in the matter. 'I absolutely declined', he recorded in a memorandum, 'to be in any sense a whip in this matter or to bring pressure, direct or indirect, to bear upon the Bishops'. They faced 'a political matter', in which he could have 'no better right to judge than any other Bishop'.<sup>51</sup> Meanwhile, he refused to provide information on the bishops' inclinations to Lord Cromer, who wished to know which bishops he should invite to a meeting on the means of preventing a mass creation of peers, because

it would be to put myself in the position of a Whip, who, though quite indirectly, was trying to manipulate the votes of Bishops, or at least to arrange them.<sup>52</sup>

In fact, in recording discussions with the parliamentary bishops during 1911 Davidson was careful to note that 'they appreciated that I was not advising them in any way'.<sup>53</sup>

Other bishops, it should be noted, did not think themselves restrained quite so severely. George Kennion of Bath and Wells circulated a letter to the Lords Spiritual advising them of an approaching meeting at Lord Bath's house on the possibility of assisting the government and thereby avoiding a mass creation of peers. However, he was careful to emphasise that his request for interested bishops to identify themselves to Lord Bath did not imply that Davidson was supportive of Lord Bath's approach. The archbishop, he noted, was 'most anxious not to give any ground for saying he has brought any pressure on anyone either way'.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid; Davidson to Selborne, 9 Aug. 1911, Selb. 2 88/69-70; Bell, *Davidson*, I, pp. 628-9.

<sup>52</sup> Memo., undated (Aug. 1911), DP 12/239-40.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid. See also Davidson to Buckle, 25 May 1911, DP 437/140-1.

<sup>54</sup> Kennion to the Lords Spiritual, 2 Aug. 1911, DP 12/250.

The apparent lack of compulsion on the bench was clear in the divergences of opinion. The Bishop of Chester, Francis Jayne, voted against the rejection of the Finance Bill in 1909, and believed that the Parliament Bill would strengthen the upper chamber, not weaken it. It would become a more ‘valuable ally’ once the Church’s temptation ‘to look there for protection of its property and status’ dissipated, enabling churchmen to recognise that they needed to appeal to, and trust ‘broadly and frankly ... [in the] just judgment ... [of the] people of the land’.<sup>55</sup> Percival of Hereford similarly told his clergy that their duty was ‘to support the Government and the House of Commons as the representative of the people in their conflict with the Lords’.<sup>56</sup> Edwyn Hoskyns of Southwell focused less on the supremacy of the electoral mandate, writing to *The Times* of his intention ‘to chivalrously screen the Throne’ from the government by voting for the Parliament Bill.<sup>57</sup>

The latitude afforded on the bench seemed to be a public confirmation of the national role the established Church claimed for itself. The bishops acted as individuals, coolly considering and advocating the needs of the community unaffected by partisan influences or sectional interests. Nevertheless, it is clear that Davidson was willing, if not to dictate to the bench, then at least to provide them with a very strong lead. In his correspondence with the parliamentary bishops, he took care to ensure they knew of his personal proclivity for the abstention faction. In his circular for Curzon, for example, he made a point of emphasising the weight of declared opinion on the bench.

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<sup>55</sup> *British Weekly*, 15 Jun. 1911.

<sup>56</sup> *Times*, 10 Jan. 1910.

<sup>57</sup> *Times*, 29 Jul. 1911.

I propose myself to support Lord Lansdowne, and I think I am in a position to say that the Bishops of St. Alban's, Bristol, St. David's, Wakefield, Southwell, and Bath and Wells have the same intention.<sup>58</sup>

In correspondence with Curzon, he acknowledged, in his own words, that he had moved 'in the direction of a "Whip"', though he denied that he could go any further than impressing the force of his own opinion on the other bishops.<sup>59</sup> Despite this claim, the lengths to which Davidson was willing to go in securing the votes of the Lords Spiritual grew significantly as the crisis proceeded. By the end of July, with the king's undertaking having been made public and the precarious balance of the factions now fully apparent, Davidson mooted to Curzon the possibility of leading the bishops into the government Lobby. To do so would help tip the odds in favour of the Parliament Bill's passage, while minimising the number of Unionist peers who would have needed to do likewise to stave off the swamping of the House.<sup>60</sup> The Unionists' authority to repeal the Parliament Bill on their return to government would be preserved, though, as Selborne and Salisbury had warned, the bishops might well undermine the Church defence campaign on the public platform.

On 28 July, Davidson wrote to Curzon noting that the bishops of St. Albans, St. Asaph, and Wakefield would be ready to vote in favour of the Parliament Bill, 'if definitely asked to do so'.<sup>61</sup> Three days later, he was even clearer about his ability to direct the bishops' bench.

Should it be necessary I expect that some of the 14 who have promised to abstain would go into the [government] Lobby. I should be grateful if you

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<sup>58</sup> Davidson to Lords Spiritual, 24 Jul. 1911, DP 437/181.

<sup>59</sup> Davidson to Curzon, 27 Jul. 1911, Cur. Mss Eur. 89/33.

<sup>60</sup> Lansdowne to Curzon, 29 Jul. 1911, Cur. Mss Eur. 89/45-6.

<sup>61</sup> Davidson to Curzon, 28 Jul. 1911, Cur. Mss Eur. 89/41-2.

can let me be kept informed as to figures and facts, as I may have opportunity of being helpful.<sup>62</sup>

So, though Davidson might disclaim any direct control of the bench, he was perfectly willing when necessary to use his communications with the bishops and his authority over them to help secure the Church's – thereby, from his perspective, the 'nation's' – interest. On 1 August, Curzon confided in Davidson that to counter the ditchers around 40 non-Liberal members of the House would need to vote with the government; episcopal votes might be vital. However, neither Lansdowne nor Curzon could directly request the assistance of the bishops. They had committed themselves to an alternative policy through a letter that Lansdowne had published in the press, in which he stated that 'in no circumstances' could his supporters actively aid the government.<sup>63</sup> Davidson, who had studiously cultivated his apparent independence from any faction, was not similarly bound. 'Should you be in a position to confirm [the] intentions' of the bishops minded to vote with the government, Curzon suggested to Davidson, 'I believe that it could be a very material factor in the solution'.<sup>64</sup>

As the debates in the Lords arrived, the intentions of Davidson and most the bishops were still not publicly known. 'I had several interviews with people who wanted to know about Bishops' probable votes', Davidson recorded later, 'but I decided that it was best not to enlighten them much' – although he had actually gone to some lengths to 'enlighten' Curzon.<sup>65</sup> A handful of bishops had come out individually in support of the government, a handful against, but most had kept their

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<sup>62</sup> Davidson to Curzon, 31 Jul. 1911, DP 437/216; Davidson to Curzon, 31 Jul. 1911, Cur. Mss Eur. 89/51.

<sup>63</sup> *Times*, 1 Aug. 1911.

<sup>64</sup> Curzon to Davidson, 1 Aug. 1911, DP 12/223-30.

<sup>65</sup> Memo., 13 Aug. 1911, DP 12/257-64.

silence. Davidson later plausibly recorded that he had hoped to abstain unless the course of debate forced his hand. However, it is clear that he had laid the ground for a move to support the government, and his discussions with other bishops during the debates pointed in that direction. During the sitting of 9 August a number of bishops confided in Davidson that they were considering voting with the government if the division became too close to call. The next morning, the day of the crucial vote, Davidson shared a ‘good deal of talk’ with bishops who were lodging at Lambeth for the debates.<sup>66</sup>

Whether or not he had decided on a course of action in advance, it was certainly true that as the day progressed, the uncertainty surrounding the debate’s outcome did not dissipate.<sup>67</sup> Recognising the result might turn on just a single vote, he rose in the House of Lords and, returning to a familiar theme, denounced ‘the callousness – I had almost said levity’ with which the Liberals and ‘ditching’ peers were treating the constitution. It was with a ‘grave sense of public duty’, he declared, that he had resolved to vote with the government.<sup>68</sup>

The announcement was not shocking to the Lords Spiritual; after all, Davidson had been discussing this possibility for a number of weeks. However, it was a surprise to the great number of peers who had assumed that, in the light of the political acrimony and the bishops’ previous comments, the majority would abstain. Davidson certainly believed that the jolt of his intervention helped carry wavering peers into the government Lobby.<sup>69</sup> Whatever his influence on the peers, the effect on the Lords Spiritual was clear. On 30 July, only three had committed themselves

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<sup>66</sup> Ibid. The Archbishop of York and bishops of Birmingham, London, Wakefield, and Winchester lodged at Lambeth.

<sup>67</sup> See memo., 13 Aug. 1911, DP 12/257-64.

<sup>68</sup> *HL Deb.* 9, c. 1059, 10 Aug. 1911.

<sup>69</sup> Memo., 13 Aug. 1911, DP 12/257-64 [underlining in original].

unequivocally to vote with the government. By the time of the division on 10 August, thirteen followed Davidson into the Lobby.<sup>70</sup> Only the bishops of Bangor and Worcester could not bring themselves to support, actively or through abstention, the government, and entered the opposition Lobby.

In the event, the division came out in the government's favour, 131 to 114. On the surface, it appeared that Davidson need not have abandoned the tactic of abstention, though it is impossible to determine how many peers were turned by his intervention. Nevertheless, in the days after the division the bishops were subjected to intense criticism from those peers and churchmen who believed that the Lords Spiritual, in their concern for the nation's spiritual and social interests, should have opposed outright any measure which might undermine the Church's institutional role in national life. In conceding to the demands of a Liberal 'rabble', the bishops were said to have betrayed the Church, and thereby the nation.

Davidson was personally denounced as a 'contemptible Jesuit Hypocrite', and the bishops more generally as being content to 'play the traitor and think it compatible with their churchmen'.<sup>71</sup> As Salisbury and Selborne had feared, those involved in the public campaign to defend the Church sensed betrayal. 'It will be no use', one correspondent supposed, 'appealing to the Rank & File to save the Church from Disestablishment now'.<sup>72</sup> One, in despair, resigned from his position in a Church defence organisation as 'it is not good for laymen to work for our Church,

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<sup>70</sup> On 30 July, the bishops of Birmingham, Chester and Hereford expressed their intentions to vote with the government. On 10 August, the archbishops of Canterbury and York, and the bishops of Bath and Wells, Birmingham, Carlisle, Chester, Hereford, Lichfield, Ripon, St. Asaph, Southwell, Wakefield and Winchester voted with the government. The bishops of Bangor and Worcester voted against. *HL Deb.* 9, c. 1075, 10 Aug. 1911.

<sup>71</sup> 'A churchwoman' to Davidson, 11 Aug. 1911, DP 437/294; A. Stephen to Davidson, undated (Aug. 1911), DP 437/250.

<sup>72</sup> [Illegible] to Davidson, 11 Aug. 1911, DP 437/286.



whilst its Heads speak and vote for a party which is pledged to destroy it'.<sup>73</sup> Such was the perceived misuse of their power, that a handful of correspondents stated they would welcome the removal of the Lords Spiritual from the House altogether.<sup>74</sup>

Leading Anglican statesmen such as Lord Robert Cecil expressed their dismay at the bishops' voting with the party pledged to disestablishment. George Wyndham, one of the leaders of the 'ditchers' in the Commons, believed they had been defeated 'by the gaiters and the rats'.<sup>75</sup> Selborne felt so betrayed that as late as 22 October he confided in Owen that 'I cannot trust myself to write or speak about the action of the Bishops'. He could not imagine that the public would rally to the Church's cause in the event of a disestablishment bill being introduced; 'absolutely no agitation created nor any exhibition of indignation on our part' would succeed in saving the Church. Owen had at least saved his own credibility through his absence – probably a calculated absence – from the division.<sup>76</sup> Still, he wrote gloomily to Edwards two days after the division that 'I wish the thirteen Bishops had abstained'.<sup>77</sup>

As seasoned as he was to controversy, even Davidson was taken aback at the volume and vehemence of the correspondence. Within a few days of the division, he commented on the 'swarm of vituperative letters' and 'the heated feeling of the uninformed against us Bishops'.<sup>78</sup> In a letter he drafted to be sent to his many critics, Davidson explained his actions: 'You ... are of the opinion that the vote we gave

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<sup>73</sup> Martin to Davidson, 14 Aug. 1911, DP 437/316-7.

<sup>74</sup> [Illegible] to Davidson, 11 Aug. 1911, DP 437/293.

<sup>75</sup> Owen, *Later life of Owen*, pp. 156-7. See also J.W. Mackail and Guy Wyndham (eds.), *The life and letters of George Wyndham*, 2 vols. (London, 1925), II, p. 699.

<sup>76</sup> He had opted instead to host a garden party for the Breton contingent of the Welsh National Eisteddfod.

<sup>77</sup> Owen, *Later life of Owen*, pp. 156-7.

<sup>78</sup> Memo., 13 Aug. 1911, DP 12/257-64.

will promote speedy Disestablishment. I believe the exact contrary to be true'.<sup>79</sup> He, no less than those who now attacked him, saw the essential congruity between the interests of the Church and nation. Yet the bishops' participation in parliament meant that they had to take political realities into account. The religious establishment in Wales needed to be protected, yes; but it was also essential that the issue not be directly invoked, or that through the bishops' actions the nonconformist accusations of sectarian interests could be corroborated. In navigating these difficulties, the Lords Spiritual were unable to provide unambiguous reassurance to those campaigning to defend the religious establishment that their resolve had not been shaken. Although the bishops had secured the best possible outcome for the Church, their intervention had undermined their authority within the Church, and to some extent weakened their popular and parliamentary support.

The politics of denominational and constitutional issues had temporarily placed the Lords Spiritual in a powerful position, to an extent not experienced since perhaps the early 1830s. Yet it was also delicate and difficult. In intervening in the House's debates, the Lords Spiritual – Davidson in particular – were obliged to consider deeply their responsibilities. They had to balance matters of principle against an assessment of the politically possible and practical. That is to say, their involvement in parliament required them to think not just in the terms of ecclesiastical – or 'national' – interests, but also of political strategy.

The dilemma attested to the essential problem presented to the bishops by their participation in the House. The religious establishment required them to represent particular interests in parliament; yet they also needed to relate these

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<sup>79</sup> Davidson template letter, 18 Aug. 1911, DP 437/333-41.

interests to the prevailing political discourse. As a result, the purpose and effect of the bishops' parliamentary interventions was often unclear, not least for those churchmen who, deeply committed to a conception of the nation in which religious establishment was essential, might rightly expect their ecclesiastical leaders to advocate unambiguously for what they considered to be the Church's, and the nation's, interests.

The inability of the Lords Spiritual – Davidson in particular – to mediate their ecclesiastical responsibilities and the political imperatives had left them exposed and assailed from within and without the Church. Their moment at the centre of the party contest was, however, only brief. By the time the disestablishment of the Welsh dioceses had been passed in the autumn of 1914 under the Parliament Act procedure, the structure of party politics and the agenda of political debate were already shifting, and shifting decisively. In the years after the war, the Church's participation in the House of Lords, which had seemed essential in discharging the responsibilities of establishment, became politically and ecclesiastically marginal.

# Part 2

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The first chapter of this part will survey the conduct of the Lords Spiritual during the period from c. 1920 to 1945. It will be shown that, despite the Church's vitality in other respects, the significance of the bishops' role in parliament diminished. The Lords Spiritual's interventions both 'thinned' and 'narrowed' – their contributions to debates became rarer, and focused on a more niche set of concerns. The Lords Spiritual became politically marginal, and their parliamentary conduct increasingly determined by their administrative and diocesan functions within the Church.

In developing this argument, the following chapter will consider in greater detail the ecclesiastical and political influences which acted to diminish the bishops' political significance. It will first address the effect of the advent of ecclesiastical self-government in 1919 on the character of the episcopal office and conduct of the parliamentary bishops. The second section will consider the Lords Spiritual's changing place in discussions of reform of the House of Lords. This will be used to establish the prevailing trends in party-political and constitutional discussions, and how these served to marginalise the Lords Spiritual.

The third chapter in this part will consider those few bishops who remained highly active in the House (at least, in comparison to their episcopal colleagues): Lang, Garbett, Henson and Pollock. Though each was highly individual in their approach to parliament, by placing their interventions in the broader ecclesiastical context it will be shown that they too responded to the changing character of the religious establishment – and indeed, the uncertainty about the place of the 'national Church' in the nation.

### 3. The Lords Spiritual, c. 1920-1945

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As the war ended in 1918, the external threat against which the Lords Spiritual had defined their role largely dissolved. The Welsh Church Act had passed under the terms of the Parliament Act in September 1914, and although its operation<sup>1</sup> had been suspended until after the war and the terms of the settlement were much contested, disestablishment eventually came in March 1920.<sup>2</sup> Having attained their most prized goal, the leaders of political nonconformity struggled to find a cause around which the movement could cohere. In the words of one historian, it proved ‘unable to define its *raison d’être*, and consequently was denied one’.<sup>3</sup>

The Free Churches’ place in the nation had also been transformed during the war. Swept along in patriotic fervour, most of their leaders and members had rallied to the aid of the state. Consequently, their status in the nation was increasingly recognised and affirmed by the agents of the state, not least by the attendance of the king and queen at the Free Church thanksgiving service at the end of the war.<sup>4</sup> By 1920, the Free Churches not only found themselves without a political ‘rallying cry’, but had hastened their own assimilation into the mainstream of the British political establishment.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> As well as that of the Government of Ireland Act.

<sup>2</sup> For accounts of the negotiations over the extent of the Church’s disendowment, see A.G. Edwards, *Memories by the Archbishop of Wales* (London, 1927), pp. 266-317; Kenneth Morgan, *Modern wales: politics, places and people* (Cardiff, 1995), esp. pp. 169-71.

<sup>3</sup> Stephen Koss, *Nonconformity in British politics* (London, 1975), p. 144, also chs. 5 and 6. See also D.W. Bebbington, *The nonconformist conscience: chapel and politics, 1870-1914* (London, 1982), ch. 5.

<sup>4</sup> John Clifford wrote of the monarch’s attendance at the Free Church thanksgiving at the Albert Hall as being ‘the beginning of a new day in the relations of the State to “dissent”’. Alan Wilkinson, *The Church of England and the First World War* (London, 1978; 3rd edn. 2014), pp. 263-4.

<sup>5</sup> Alan Wilkinson, *Dissent or conform? War, peace and the English churches, 1900-1945* (Cambridge, 1986), chs. 2 and 3. See also, Robert Pope, ‘Christ and Caesar? Welsh nonconformists and the state, 1914-1918’, in Matthew Cragoe and Chris Williams (eds.), *Wales and war: society, politics and religion in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries* (Cardiff, 2007), pp. 165-83.

The declining antagonism with the Free Churches enabled the established Church to strengthen its place within society. Christianity still permeated public life and civic ritual as it had before, but it was reinforced by the traumas of the First World War and the moral and cultural standards promoted by the BBC.<sup>6</sup> In many ways, Christian perspectives seemed to have a renewed intellectual and political significance. Debates about the role of the state continued to be influenced by theological insights. The association between English national character and protestant religion was invoked to suggest a sense of community beyond class division, and to tutor the expanding electorate in their civic responsibilities.<sup>7</sup>

With increasing authority, the leaders of the Church of England were able to assume a recognised place of leadership over British Christianity as ‘the appropriate vehicle for the dissemination of a general, Christian influence’.<sup>8</sup> This was particularly true of the Archbishop of Canterbury, who increasingly presented himself – and, indeed, was recognised – as the *de facto* ‘voice’ of the British churches.<sup>9</sup> The increasingly hostile international context further stimulated this tendency. The rise of totalitarian regimes, which not only persecuted religious communities but seemed to repudiate Europe’s Christian foundations, drew the British churches together.

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<sup>6</sup> S.J.D. Green, *The passing of protestant England: secularisation and social change c. 1920-1960* (Cambridge, 2011), pp. 60-80; S.J.D. Green, ‘Survival and autonomy: on the strange fortunes and peculiar legacy of ecclesiastical establishment in the modern British state, c. 1920 to the present day’, in S.J.D. Green and R.C. Whiting (eds.), *The boundaries of the state in modern Britain* (Cambridge, 1996), p. 305; Matthew Grimley, *Citizenship, community, and the Church of England: liberal Anglican theories of the state between the wars* (Oxford, 2004), pp. 10-12.

<sup>7</sup> Matthew Grimley, ‘The religion of Englishness: puritanism, providentialism, and “national character”’, *Journal of British studies* 46 (2007), pp. 884-906; John Wolfe, *God and Greater Britain: religion and national life in Britain and Ireland 1843-1945* (London, 1994).

<sup>8</sup> Green, ‘Survival and autonomy’, p. 309.

<sup>9</sup> Philip Williamson, ‘National days of prayer: the churches, the state and public worship in Britain, 1899-1957’, *English historical review* 129 (2013), pp. 323-66.

In many respects, the Church's place in the nation was stronger after the war than it had been before – and yet the bishops' involvement in the House of Lords during the inter-war period was hardly suggestive of strength. True, with the decline of the threat presented by political nonconformity, the place of the bishops in the legislature seemed more secure. Yet it was apparent that the Lords Spiritual were becoming a more marginal presence in the House. In one respect, this was a result of political change, most notably the reconfiguration of the party-political structure, with the decline of the Liberal Party, and emergence of an apparently radical 'socialist' party. The identities of 'class' – rather than those based in part on denominational attachment – came to dominate the political discourse. As a result, while constitutional differences – chiefly over the future of the union with Ireland, though also over the relationship between the established Church and the state in England and Wales – had defined the political contest during the pre-war period, the inter-war party conflict revolved around questions of social welfare and industrial relations.

While the political importance of the Church had diminished, so too had Church leaders' estimation of the value of engagement in the central political issues through parliament. The great majority of the bishops came to appreciate their access to the House only so far as it related to their role within the institutions of the Church itself, rather than as it related to wider political and policy issues. Their function in the House remained tied to their leadership of the established Church, though it derived less from a claim to constitutional authority, than individual expertise and personal spiritual insight. Before the war, though latitude was afforded to the bishops, most – thanks largely to Davidson's lead – shared a clear sense of their function in parliament. After the war, those few bishops who continued to contribute

to the House did so in an increasingly idiosyncratic fashion. Although in many respects, the Church was better able after the war to enact a role on behalf of ‘the nation’, within parliament the Lords Spiritual’s conduct was increasingly determined by niche ecclesiastical concerns.

Contrary to the trend, the nature of ecclesiastical change increased the political importance of the Archbishop of Canterbury, particularly in relation to the conduct of the nation’s foreign affairs. He continued to believe himself to be a member of a broader political elite, but balanced this role against his growing responsibility to express moral concerns on behalf of the leaders of the British churches. Increasingly, he acted as the ‘voice’ of British Christianity in parliament.

On the face of it, over the years to Davidson’s retirement in 1928 there was a degree of continuity in the pattern of episcopal contributions in the House. The Archbishop of Canterbury’s dominance of the bench had increased during the war as Davidson acted on his assumed responsibility to ensure that, in seeking to bring the conflict to a speedy and victorious conclusion, the nation did not discard what he supposed were its long-held principles in the process. Before the war, the archbishop had been responsible for almost one in every four episcopal contributions to House of Lords debates; during it, he was responsible for nearer one in six. However, the relative balance between the senior bishops and their junior colleagues was largely restored during the 1920s. Davidson accounted for nearly half of the episcopal contributions to the House during the 1920s. Non-*ex officio* bishops accounted for the majority of the remainder – one in four all of episcopal contributions to debates, broadly in line with their pre-war conduct.

However, despite the apparent continuity, important shifts in the pattern of episcopal contributions were under way. Progressively fewer bishops were



participating in the House. Whereas in the pre-war years, on average nine non-*ex officio* bishops might have been expected to contribute to at least one debate in a typical parliamentary session, in the 1920s fewer than half that number could be expected. Three-quarters of these contributions came from just two bishops: Cyril Garbett of Southwark and from 1932 Winchester, and Bertram Pollock of Norwich.

The division on the bench between the more and the less participant bishops continued to grow in its extremes into the 1930s. Cosmo Lang, Davidson's long-serving deputy in York and his eventual successor at Canterbury, and Garbett accounted for some 70 *per cent* of *all* episcopal contributions made to the House from 1928 to 1939. Early acknowledgement of this trend may have informed Davidson's willingness to concede to the 'logical, reasonable and consistent' reduction of episcopal seats in parliament under the Lords reform proposals of 1922. If he could not see 'any harm in concentrating the very real responsibility' of ecclesiastical representation among a handful of bishops, it was perhaps because such a process had already begun.<sup>10</sup>

This 'thinning' of effective episcopal representation in the Lords was accompanied by a 'narrowing' of their collective interests. In the ten years to 1914, matters relating to the administration, doctrine and governance of the Church had accounted for one in every ten episcopal contributions to the House. During the 1920s, the relative importance of these contributions trebled. The House, of course, occupied a significant place in the ecclesiastical governance of the Church. Legislative authority over the established Church rested in parliament; the lay Church was embodied, in an idealised sense, by the members of the House of

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<sup>10</sup> *HL Deb.* 51, cc. 651-2, 20 Jul. 1922.

Commons, the ‘nation’ by parliament, and the ecclesiastical leadership of the Church by the Lords Spiritual.<sup>11</sup> Changes after the war in the mechanisms by which Church measures passed into law greatly enhanced this aspect of the Lords Spiritual’s role, if for no other reason than the increasing efficiency of the legislative process following the passage of the Church of England Assembly (Powers) Act in 1919 – known more succinctly as the ‘Enabling Act’ – and the creation of the Church Assembly.

It was widely acknowledged that the system for reforming the Church’s administration, organisation and doctrine which preceded the Enabling Act had become unworkable. Ecclesiastical reform had to pass through both houses of parliament as any other public bill might. Yet by the latter end of the nineteenth century, it was apparent that governments no longer wished to afford the parliamentary time necessary for even the most minor and uncontroversial of Church reforms. Of the 227 Church bills introduced from 1880 to 1915, only thirty-three had become law. One had been rejected and 183 dropped, while 162 had never been discussed at all.<sup>12</sup>

Under the provisions of the Enabling Act, a new representative Church Assembly would be able to prepare and debate Church measures, which would receive the effect of an Act of Parliament on a simple vote of support in both houses of parliament. Essentially, the Act preserved the sovereignty of parliament, while

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<sup>11</sup> Of course, many peers were lay churchmen and would not accept that the House of Commons alone represented the laity, nor that the Lords Spiritual alone were able to speak for the Church in the House of Lords.

<sup>12</sup> Wolmer memo., 19 Oct. 1915, Selb. 3 Eng. Hist. 988/1-14; *Archbishops’ committee on Church and state: report with appendices* (London, 1916), pp. 2-3.

devolving its function of debating and perfecting Church legislation to a representative ecclesiastical body.<sup>13</sup>

The resulting increase in ecclesiastical legislation passing through the House necessarily made demands upon the Lords Spiritual. Such legislation, both before and after 1919, was usually introduced to the House by a member of the bishops' bench. The Archbishop of Canterbury typically assumed responsibility for introducing the more general administrative measures. Those which dealt with more specific geographical or ecclesiastic matters were often introduced by the bishop or peer most associated with the initiative. Following the passage of the Enabling Act, the weight of this work necessarily increased. In the first few years of the Assembly's operation, between three and five measures received Royal Assent each year.<sup>14</sup> In the exceptional 1926 parliamentary session, ten Assembly measures were debated in the House of Lords. In effect, the bishop introducing the measure became a delegate for the Assembly. Davidson in particular commented that, though he might personally oppose a particular measure, as the chairman of the Assembly he was 'bound to see its decisions carried through'.<sup>15</sup>

The weight of ecclesiastical business in parliament had grown, requiring a greater number of interventions by the Lords Spiritual. On at least one occasion, Davidson actively encouraged bishops to attend a division in the House on a Church

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<sup>13</sup> Measures were also assessed by an Ecclesiastical Committee of the two houses of parliament. This committee assessed measures and reported to parliament 'as to the expediency thereof especially with relation to the constitution right of all His Majesty's subjects'.

<sup>14</sup> Assembly measures which passed into law during the period from 1920 to 1922: Conventions of the Clergy Measure 1920, (Royal Assent, 23 Dec. 1920); Parochial Church Council (Powers) Measure, 1921 (Royal Assent 1 Jul. 1921); Ecclesiastical Commissioners Measure 1921 (Royal Assent 28 Jul. 1921); Union of Benefices Measure 1921 (Royal Assent 17 Aug. 1921); Representation of the Laity (amendment) Measure, 1922 (Royal Assent 12 Apr. 1922); Pluralities Act, 1838 (Amendment) Measure, 1922 (Royal Assent 4 Aug. 1922); Revised Tables of Lessons Measure, 1922 (Royal Assent, 4 Aug. 1922).

<sup>15</sup> *HL Deb.* 58, cc. 111-49, 2 Jul. 1924; HP, Henson journal, 2 Jul. 1924, reproduced in Hensley Henson, *Retrospect of an unimportant life*, 3 vols. (London, 1943), II, p. 92.

measure in order to prevent its defeat by other interests in the chamber.<sup>16</sup> However, the passage of most measures was greatly expedited by the Enabling Act procedure, requiring little actual investment of time by either the parliamentary authorities or the Lords Spiritual. Even the 1928 Prayer Book measure, though much contested in the House of Commons, had a relatively uncomplicated passage through the Lords. It became an increasingly common practice for bishops to introduce ecclesiastical measures in batches. On 17 June 1931, Lang and Frank Woods of Winchester introduced the Channel Islands (representation) Measure, the Channel Islands (Church legislation) Measure, and the Ecclesiastical Commissioners (provision for unbeneficed clergy) Amendment Measure in succession. All passed without provoking a division or even debate.<sup>17</sup>

Contributions to these specifically ecclesiastical issues came to dominate the parliamentary interests of the bishops of ‘lesser sees’.<sup>18</sup> By the 1930s four in every ten of these bishops’ contributions concerned Church measures and debates. Bishops involved in the passage of measures through the Assembly, or who professed expert knowledge on the aspect of ecclesiastical government concerned, were drawn to the House to explain its significance to the peers.<sup>19</sup> Although the majority of the issues were uncontroversial, a small but significant number were matters of deep division among the bishops, not least the fourteen measures introduced in the first six years of the Enabling Act’s operation which affected the scope of episcopal authority. The

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<sup>16</sup> In this case, representatives of the City of London were opposed to the Union of Benefices and Disposal of Churches (Metropolis) Measure 1926: Davidson circular to Lords Spiritual, 16 Jul. 1926, DP 210/236.

<sup>17</sup> *HL Deb.* 81, cc. 227-32, 17 Jun. 1931. Tidying up Church business, that same day the Earl of Midleton also introduced the Benefices (exercises of rights of presentation) Measure. *HL Deb.* 81, cc. 186-227, 17 Jun. 1931.

<sup>18</sup> ‘The bishops of lesser sees’ are taken to include all those who do not receive their Writ of Summons on an *ex officio* basis – that is to say, all Lords Spiritual save the archbishops of Canterbury and York, and the bishops of London, Durham and Winchester.

<sup>19</sup> See comments in Cyril Garbett, *Church and state in England* (London, 1950), pp. 124-5.

bishops discussed these issues in the Church Assembly, and amongst themselves at the periodic Bishops' Meetings. However, they retained a capacity to act independently. The House of Lords became an important platform from which they could continue the debate outside of exclusively ecclesiastical forums, and even try to overturn the decisions of the Church's own representative bodies. The measure to create the Shrewsbury diocese, for example, much opposed by Hensley Henson of Durham, was rejected in the House of Lords by a single vote. Eight bishops voted in its favour, two against.<sup>20</sup>

Though such ecclesiastical measures clearly drew episcopal attention, the contributions were still dominated by a handful of bishops. Almost half of the non-*ex officio* bishops' contributions to Church matters came from Pollock of Norwich. An accomplished administrator, Pollock's prominence reflected his concern for the structures of ecclesiastical governance, which exerted a large influence on patterns of life in his predominantly rural diocese.<sup>21</sup> The great majority of Pollock's contributions, which accounted for one-quarter of *all* contributions made by the bishops of lesser sees, concerned Church measures.

Pollock's involvement in Church measures in the House was indicative of the broader trend: the role of the Lords Spiritual was becoming more intimately tied to their practical involvement in the wider life of the Church. Before the war, the parliamentary bishops had exercised political influence as an 'estate of the realm', assuming an authority to intervene in contemporary politics on the basis of the

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<sup>20</sup> *HL Deb.* 63, cc. 431-75, 4 Mar. 1926; Henson, *Retrospect*, II, pp. 94-6; HP, Henson journal, 4 Mar. 1926.

<sup>21</sup> Matthew Grimley, 'Pollock, Bertram (1863-1943)', ODNB; Bernard Palmer, *High and mitred: a study of Prime Minister as bishop-makers 1837-1977* (Melksham, 1992), pp. 160-1. See also, Bertram Pollock, Bertram Pollock, *A twentieth century bishop: recollections and reflections* (London, 1944), esp. Introduction and ch. 18.

established Church's historic role in the constitution. Crucially, the insight they brought to parliamentary deliberations reached beyond the institutional boundaries of the Church. In contrast, by the 1920s the Lords Spiritual's involvement in the House became increasingly characterised by their leadership role within the Church itself; they acted less as 'ecclesiastical statesmen' than as diocesan and ecclesiastical administrators.

This was particularly true of the Lords Spiritual's engagement with social and economic issues. While the bishops had once been involved in these issues so far as they concerned individual morality and what they considered to be the insidious influences of private enterprise, notably in relation to alcohol and gambling, they now largely addressed collective issues and the structural deficiencies of the state in its efforts to improve social conditions. Important contributions were made on unemployment, slum clearance and overcrowding, and industrial unrest. During the 1930s one in every five episcopal contributions to the House involved the nation's economic and social relations. So actively were these issues pursued by some bishops that on two successive days in March 1924, debates on youth unemployment were introduced by members of the bench.<sup>22</sup>

To an extent, episcopal involvement in social matters reflected the broader trends of political debate. The war all but won, the Lloyd George Coalition turned its attention to the winning of the peace. Though a 'land fit for heroes' was promised, economic and social problems mounted and fed support for politically organised labour. The political agenda changed; social and industrial issues took the political foreground and the question of the state's role in the provision of social welfare

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<sup>22</sup> *HL Deb.* 60, cc. 571-97, 18 Mar. 1924; *HL Deb.* 56, cc. 852-97, 19 Mar. 1924.

became increasingly prominent. Before the war, the bishops had demonstrated little interest in these issues – their focus was on matters of personal morality, in particular relating to alcohol licensing and gambling. However, the state's post-war expansion into social work was not of incidental interest to churchmen. These were, after all, facilities and agencies which had previously been under religious supervision and direction.<sup>23</sup>

The tendency for the parliamentary bishops to share in the shift towards collectivist modes of thought was clear.<sup>24</sup> Regarding the occupation of unemployed juveniles both Davidson and Garbett pressed for the extension of the government's support centres, with Garbett arguing that attendance at such centres should be made compulsory.<sup>25</sup> Such issues also, of course, invoked churchmen's continuing interest and influence in matters of education. However, the episcopal pressure for increased state involvement was strongest in matters of slum clearance, the reconditioning of old houses and the building of new working-class properties. Garbett in particular repeatedly pressed for the government to encourage the trade unions to permit an expansion in the number of skilled housebuilders, chiefly by guaranteeing them such a large volume of work that their members need not fear unemployment or reduced standards of living.<sup>26</sup> Episcopal criticisms, again particularly from Garbett, of the failure of private enterprise alone to solve the housing crisis became increasingly direct and overt as the 1930s progressed.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> For an overview, see M. Penelope Hall and Ismene V. Howes, *The Church in social work: a study of moral welfare work undertaken by the Church of England* (London, 1965), esp. pp. 31–51.

<sup>24</sup> E.R. Norman, *Church and society in England 1770-1970: a historical study* (Oxford, 1976), esp. chs. 6 and 7. See also, Wilkinson, *The Church*, pp. 282-4.

<sup>25</sup> *HL Deb.* 60, cc. 571-8, 18 Mar. 1924.

<sup>26</sup> *HL Deb.* 53, cc. 892-3, 25 Apr. 1923.

<sup>27</sup> See for example, *HL Deb.* 93, c. 748, 18 Jul. 1934.

However, the bishops' engagement in these issues was not a simple reflection of contemporary political thought. The compelling spiritual case for the Church to be at the forefront of the remodelling of post-war society was clear to most Church leaders. At a meeting of the Church Council on War Problems in April 1918, Davidson himself called not just for reconstruction, but for a 'new birth'. Demobilisation, the bereavement of communities, economic dislocations, and the displacement of populations, mixed with a growing sense of social injustice, presented novel national and pastoral problems. Those concerned with their material existence, with the overcoming of their social and economic deprivation, had little time to consider the rights and wrongs of Christian morality; such communities became easy prey for the emerging radicalism embodied by the rise of the politically organised – worse, potentially atheistic – labour movement.<sup>28</sup> During a House of Lords debate in 1917 on industrial unrest, Lang tellingly intervened to draw attention to the growing economic disparities in society and the 'dehumanising' effects of industrial production. He urged that labourers be afforded a fairer share of the proceeds of their work in the post-war world.<sup>29</sup>

More than this, the growing concern among churchmen for questions of social justice stemmed from a resurgent sense of the Church's declining place in national life. Christianity's long suspected lack of appeal to working-class people seemed to be confirmed by the experience of the war. The so-called *Fifth Report* of the 1916 National Mission,<sup>30</sup> on *Christianity and Industrial Problems*, pointed to the 'lamentable failure' of the Church in engaging with social issues. The relations that

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<sup>28</sup> G.I.T. Machin, *Churches and social issues in twentieth-century Britain* (Oxford, 1998), ch. 2; Wilkinson, *The Church*, pp. 281-4.

<sup>29</sup> *HL Deb.* 26, cc. 914-26, 7 Nov. 1917.

<sup>30</sup> Aside from the publication of its reports, the National Mission was rather a damp squib of an evangelical campaign.



had developed between employers and employees – competitive, even predatory – were, it was contended, inimical to the attainment of a truly Christian society.<sup>31</sup> Similarly, the 1919 inter-denominational report *The Army and Religion* suggested that many soldiers knew little of Christianity's doctrines and teachings.<sup>32</sup> More broadly, it seemed apparent that the Church's influence on matters of personal moral conduct – on drinking and gambling, censorship and the Sabbath, birth control and divorce – was being challenged in the post-war world, and indeed seemed to be declining.<sup>33</sup>

The perception of decline affirmed for many churchmen the imperative for the Church to engage with social work with renewed vigour. Many churchmen, notably leading Liberal Anglicans, though also more conservative members of the bench, believed that national unity, fractured by growing social and industrial tensions and identities, could be restored through the promotion of a national, Christian, moral community.<sup>34</sup>

These concerns met in the Conference on Christian Politics, Economics and Citizenship (COPEC) in 1924. The conference not only signalled the ascendancy of such social concerns, but also promised to grant the rather nebulous movement a measure of cohesion.<sup>35</sup> It was contended that the Church had failed to respond to the social implications of the Gospel; in response, it encouraged churchmen to intervene actively to rectify the nation's social problems.

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<sup>31</sup> *Christianity and Industrial Problems: being a report of the archbishops' fifth committee of inquiry* (London, 1918), pp. 79-81; Norman, *Church and society*, pp. 241-2.

<sup>32</sup> Wilkinson, *The Church*, pp. 160-5.

<sup>33</sup> Machin, *Churches and social issues*, ch. 3.

<sup>34</sup> Grimley, *Citizenship*, esp. ch. 3.

<sup>35</sup> Norman, *Church and society*, ch. 7; Grimley, *Citizenship*, pp. 40; Green, 'Survival and autonomy', p. 310.

What COPEC produced was less a manifesto to address social problems, than an affirmation of the Church's right and responsibility to intervene on social questions. This impetus continued to grow through later gatherings of Church leaders, such as the Conference on Church, Community and State in Oxford in 1937, and the Malvern Conference chaired by William Temple in 1940.<sup>36</sup> Many Church leaders were driven by a renewed impetus to engage practically in local communities – Birmingham hosted a COPEC housing scheme; in Leeds churchmen led the way in slum clearance, as did the St. Pancras House Improvement Society in London.<sup>37</sup>

It is little surprising that those bishops who were prominent in House of Lords debates on social matters were among those most concerned for the Church to re-engage with society along COPEC's lines. Garbett especially directly linked social deprivation with the nation's spiritual degradation.<sup>38</sup> He alone accounted for nearly half of all episcopal contributions to social and economic concerns throughout the 1920s, his dominance over the bench in these matters increased further during the 1930s.

The Lords Spiritual's apparent concern to promote the 'national interest', at least so far as it had been defined as the harmonious conduct of political and social affairs, had migrated. While constitutional and party-political conflict had once been the focus of these efforts, during the inter-war period matters of social welfare increased in prominence. Poor living conditions and prospects, it was supposed, lay at the heart of the nation's growing social and political animosities – and the declining influence of Christianity.

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<sup>36</sup> Machin, *Churches and social issues*, pp. 32-5.

<sup>37</sup> Norman, *Church and society*, p. 350.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 349-50.

The lack of the discipline of home and workplace, of educational opportunities and of ‘character-building’ leisure activities had produced a morally-reduced class of people who were ill-suited to, and had little investment in, the existing order. ‘[W]hile you have bad housing’, reasoned Garbett, ‘you have a very fertile seed ground for the agitator’. Men ‘untouched by revolutionary agitation’, would find themselves ‘driven to desperation’ in the search for affordable housing.<sup>39</sup> Temple similarly, while acknowledging the health effects of poor accommodation, emphasised ‘that there is political health at stake also’. ‘There can be little hope of real political and social well-being becoming established in the country’, he continued, ‘until we have genuinely solved this housing problem’.<sup>40</sup>

It is worth noting that although most of the contributions on these matters came from bishops who identified more closely with social radicalism and the political left, the concern to address social deprivation and promote national unity was not simply the preserve of liberals. Henson was scathing of the kind of social radicalism of which Temple was the respectable face. He championed ‘the individual’ over homogenising collectivist identities.<sup>41</sup> In the House, his belief in the competitive economic system blended with his virulent anti-trade unionism and moral objection to socialism. The lamentable social conditions mining communities suffered from – the low-quality housing, the poor educational and employment prospects – were ‘hostile, monotonously hostile’ to the cultivation of independent thought and action. This left miners and their families vulnerable to ‘sinister

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<sup>39</sup> *HL Deb.* 53, c. 892, 25 Apr. 1923. See also Garbett’s comments on the effects of youth unemployment, *HL Deb.* 54, 16 May 1923, cc. 240-3.

<sup>40</sup> *HL Deb.* 62, cc. 230-3, 22 Jul. 1925.

<sup>41</sup> Owen Chadwick, *Hensley Henson: a study in the friction between Church and state* (Norwich, 1994), pp. 203-4; Norman, *Church and society*, pp. 326-9.

organisation[s] trading on their prejudices, trading on their fears'.<sup>42</sup> The 'ubiquitous, cruel and continuing tyranny' of the trade unions – he claimed to be tempering his words – degraded the character of their members and endangered the existence of the state.<sup>43</sup> On this basis Henson lent his support to the Trade Disputes and Trade Unions Bill, a measure introduced in response to the General Strike of 1926 which sought to restrain the right to picket, alter the rules on political levies to the detriment of the Labour Party, and render 'coercive' strike action illegal.

Henson's concern for the political troubles of industrial districts was a testament to the growing localism of the parliamentary bishops' contributions. The Lords Spiritual's claim to authority in matters of social welfare was increasingly derived from specific episcopal diocesan experience within the Church of England. Of course, local connections had long influenced the parliamentary bishops. Episcopal contributions to Church measures were often guided by these interests, while some of the Lords Spiritual's more esoteric interventions had been grounded in highly specific local concerns. Watkin Williams of Bangor, for example, spoke in the House on several occasions on questions relating to merchant seamen. Aware that the issue lay well beyond the assumed bounds of episcopal expertise, he justified his interventions by noting his diocese's extensive coastline, its resident seamen and its experience of wreckages.<sup>44</sup>

However, the assertion of direct diocesan authority for intervening in social matters, particularly those relating to unemployment and housing, was relatively novel and increasingly prominent. In a debate on unemployment in 1924, both John

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<sup>42</sup> Henson was by no means alone among the bishops, notably those of a more social liberal bent, in believing the working-classes were susceptible to a reductive 'herd instinct'. See Grimley, *Citizenship*, p. 108.

<sup>43</sup> *HL Deb.* 68, cc. 132-7, 5 Jul. 1927.

<sup>44</sup> *Parl. Deb.* 165, cc. 1378-80, 27 Nov. 1906.

Kempthorne of Lichfield, who introduced the debate, and Lang who closed it, justified their interventions by reference to the experiences of their respective localities. ‘My excuse for speaking about it at all’, Kempthorne claimed,

is that I happen to live in a part of the country, the Midlands, where unemployment is specially acute, and I have been in close touch for many years with some of the big centres in the north.<sup>45</sup>

Henson justified his interventions on trade relations and unemployment in a similar fashion. He claimed his authority through his geographical association with a troubled area, and interestingly also on historical precedent. In contributing to the debate on the 1927 Trade Disputes and Trade Unions Bill, Henson reminded the peers ‘that interest in economic conditions is the tradition of the great see which I have the honour to hold’.<sup>46</sup> Shute Barrington, Henson’s predecessor by more than a century, had founded a number of co-operative societies, while Brooke Westcott had succeeded in bringing to an end the 1892 strike in the Durham collieries. Henson’s choice of words in recollecting his participation in the House in his autobiography was notable. ‘I succeeded in attending the debates’, he noted, ‘whenever the subjects under discussion did, in my judgement, require that the Bishop of Durham should address the House’.<sup>47</sup>

The Lords Spiritual did not claim the authority of the moralist or princely bishop. Rather, contributions were predicated upon the bishops’ technical knowledge and experience in the effective running of social initiatives in their dioceses. This was clear in Lang’s contributions to a debate on housing in April 1923. Having spoken at length on the importance of effective regional planning he drew the

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<sup>45</sup> *HL Deb.* 56, c. 852, 19 Mar. 1924.

<sup>46</sup> *HL Deb.* 68, c. 132, 5 Jul. 1927.

<sup>47</sup> Henson, *Retrospect*, II, p. 83.

House's attention to the example set by a housing scheme on the South Yorkshire coalfield, the result of a conference of local authorities over which he had presided.<sup>48</sup> Similarly, during a debate of 1927 on slum clearance, Winnington-Ingram of London provided the peers with insights from a public utility scheme in his diocese which had been established by two of his curates. He further gave the House the benefit of the results from the Church's recently-commissioned survey of houses in St. Pancras, Chelsea, Westminster and Fulham.<sup>49</sup>

The increased tendency for bishops to employ technical and statistical knowledge in their contributions was notable. Garbett's many contributions on housing issues related the personal tales of hardship he had been confronted by in the course of his diocesan work. However, these observations were augmented by his insights into early surveys of housing conditions. In introducing a debate in July 1925 on the failure to achieve building targets in London, he cited not only census evidence to support his comments, but the reports of the London County Council and the recommendations of the London Housing Committee and London Housing League.<sup>50</sup>

Of course, the bishops were not alone among the members of the upper chamber in being able to speak with intimate knowledge of particular regions. Yet no other member of the upper House could be considered to have a 'constituency' in quite the same way. Several bishops from around the country could attend debates, such as that on housing introduced by Garbett in July 1925, to demonstrate on one hand the national character of the issue and on the other the need for regional

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<sup>48</sup> *HL Deb.* 53, cc. 883-9, 25 Apr. 1923.

<sup>49</sup> *HL Deb.* 69, cc. 505-7, 5 Dec. 1927.

<sup>50</sup> *HL Deb.* 62, cc. 224-30, 22 Jul. 1925.

sensitivity.<sup>51</sup> The unique quality of the contribution the bishops could offer to the House in this respect was clear. Earl Beauchamp, the soon-to-be leader of the Liberals in the Lords, expressed his pleasure in 1923 that bishops should be able to apply such ‘personal knowledge and experience’ on housing matters.<sup>52</sup>

Despite the enthusiasm of a coterie of bishops, the Lords Spiritual in general made limited contributions to matters of social welfare. In fact, in the guiding political issues of the day in the matters which determined the party contest and national discourse the House was rarely used as a forum for the episcopate to engage. In the case of the 1926 general strike, for example, only one Lord Spiritual, Davidson, made any intervention of substance in the House. Unambiguous in his support for the government, it was an appeal, a surprisingly short one for Davidson, for reassurances to be provided that, once the strike was over, miners’ standards of living would not be driven down by the ministry’s action or inaction. His broad concern was to maintain public support for the government and, inferentially, undermine the hold of the union ‘oligarchy’ over working people which had divided the national community.<sup>53</sup>

For other bishops, however, though they might have some involvement in the resolution of the miners’ dispute, it was clear that they did not regard parliament as an appropriate forum for intervention. Unlike in the pre-war constitutional conflict, parliament did not provide a forum in which the disputing parties – in this case, mine owners, the miners and the government – could meet and be encouraged to reconcile. Moreover, for some churchmen, not least Temple, the facilities of the state had proven inadequate to the task. He noted in his 1928 volume, *Christianity and the*

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid, cc. 224-42.

<sup>52</sup> *HL Deb.* 53, c. 910, 25 Apr. 1923.

<sup>53</sup> *HL Deb.* 64, cc. 48-51, 5 May 1926.

*state*, that though men still spoke of the state's 'omni-competence', 'its total incompetence to settle the affairs of the community is the chief feature of English political life in the last two years'.<sup>54</sup> It was for this reason that, despite his leadership of COPEC, Temple was much less prominent in House of Lords debates on social matters than Garbett, who valued the opportunity to bring what he supposed were spiritual values to the state's work.<sup>55</sup>

Episcopal action seeking to restore national unity, as such, took place outside of the House of Lords. Davidson was engaged in private as well as public efforts to promote conciliation, offering himself as an impartial intermediary between the conflicting parties and encouraging the recognition of the nation's common interests. During the General Strike of May 1926, for example, he organised a public 'Appeal from the Churches', gaining for it the support of Free Church and Roman Catholic leaders. The churches' proposals – for the resumption of the government subsidy and restoration of wages – were politically sensitive; sufficiently so, in fact, for the BBC to refuse to report on them. However, the Appeal was perhaps most influential in its emphasis on the need to settle the dispute without permanently embittering national relations. The strike having later been called off by the Trades Union Council after 9 days, Davidson wrote to congratulate Baldwin on his professed desire that 'the whole British people should not look backwards but forward, and resume their work in a spirit of co-operation and goodwill'.<sup>56</sup>

The bishops' growing proclivity to contribute on an individual basis was also evident in relation to those issues which invoked Christian moral interest. This was

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<sup>54</sup> William Temple, *Christianity and the state* (London, 1928), p. 118.

<sup>55</sup> See chapter 5.2.

<sup>56</sup> G.K.A. Bell, *Randall Davidson, Archbishop of Canterbury*, 2 vols. (London, 1935; 2nd edn. 1938), II, pp. 1304-18; *Times*, 16 Apr. 1926. See also Grimley, *Citizenship*, ch. 3; Wilkinson, *The Church*, pp. 286-7.



particularly evident during debates on reform of the divorce laws. Although Davidson denied orchestrating the bench, it was clear in the early 1920s that the bishops presented a united front to the House. At the third reading of the 1920 bill introduced by Lord Buckmaster to expand the causes for divorce, both archbishops and nineteen other Lords Spiritual attended to vote against it.<sup>57</sup>

However, as the inter-war period proceeded, the divergences on the bench grew. Bishops increasingly contributed to these issues on the basis of their own individual doctrinal and biblical insights, and their ethical beliefs. Thus, though the Church remained doctrinally committed to lifelong marriage – a commitment reaffirmed by the Lambeth Conference of 1930 – Henson could claim both practical and scriptural bases for supporting an expansion of the causes for divorce in 1937, as could Barnes of Birmingham. By the same token, Michael Furse of St Albans could claim cause to oppose it.<sup>58</sup> Several other of the senior Lords Spiritual, including Temple and Winnington-Ingram, followed Lang's lead and abstained from the division, finding themselves unable to reconcile their religious objection to divorce and their acknowledgement of the practical necessity of its expansion.<sup>59</sup>

The growing individuality of the bishops' contributions to the House raised the greatest political controversy on issues of foreign affairs. Such interventions could be prolific, although – as with other issues in these decades – it is worth emphasising that only a handful of bishops chose to contribute to parliamentary

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<sup>57</sup> *HL Deb.* 40, c. 731, 22 Jun. 1920. Lords Spiritual who voted against the third reading: archbishops of Canterbury and York, the bishops of Bath and Wells, Birmingham, Bristol, Chichester, Coventry, Ely, Gloucester, Lichfield, London, Norwich, Oxford, Peterborough, Rochester, St. Edmundsbury and Ipswich, Salisbury, Sheffield, Southwell, Wakefield, and Winchester.

<sup>58</sup> *HL Deb.* 105, cc. 761-5, 24 Jun. 1937.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, c. 751.

debates on these questions. For those who did, the House provided a platform from which a personal Christian morality could be expressed.

Henson spoke powerfully, if not frequently, on foreign affairs on the basis of his appraisal of the affairs of statesmen and of Britain's role in the world. In a sense, his contribution to the House in this respect was akin to that of earlier Lords Spiritual, pressing the government to adhere to a set of supposed British values. Yet it was also peculiar, based upon a very particular understanding of the international political situation. Henson believed that the totalitarian paradigm of government was fundamentally incompatible with that founded upon Christian values. It was crucial that Britain – which he supposed was the bastion and guardian of Christian civilization, human reason, and liberty – should actively proclaim its principles lest the brutal force of the totalitarians prevail.

While public and political sympathies – indeed, those of most of the other bishops – ran ‘hot and cold’ on appeasement as the prospect of war loomed, Henson was implacable in his opposition. He used the House to press statesmen to stand firmly behind the credos of British and Christian government. He cited historical lapses of these principles in an effort to induce the peers to appreciate the importance of adhering to ‘moral principles affirmed and national honour pledged and public commitments entered into’.<sup>60</sup> He chided the government for ‘subordinating principles to what we are pleased to call interests’; in their appeasement of the dictators, the government was abandoning the Christian and British values of liberty, justice and the rule of law. Even as public and religious opinion swung behind

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<sup>60</sup> *HL Deb.* 109, c. 140, 18 May 1938.

Chamberlain's Munich compromise, Henson clung to his views in opposition to the primate and the otherwise apparently settled opinion of the bishops' bench.<sup>61</sup>

Although Henson retired before the outbreak of war, George Bell continued to contribute to the House in this manner. His adherence to the demands of his conscience often placed him in stark opposition to the government and its military policies. Although he emphasised that military victory would come to nothing if ethical principles were abandoned, Bell's concern was not necessarily to ensure fidelity to some specious national mission or peculiarly British values. Rather, his criticisms were inspired by a greater sense of Christian duty, a spiritual concern for human welfare and the moral law. In an article in *The Fortnightly Review* in November 1939, he claimed that the Church had a prophetic duty in wartime to settle 'the questions of right and wrong' and 'declare what is just'. Christian responsibility, he concluded, was universal: 'The Church in any country fails to be the Church if it forgets that its members in one nation have a fellowship with its members in every nation'.<sup>62</sup>

An authoritative ecumenist with strong connections with churchmen on the European continent, Bell's concern in the House was for the victims of Nazism, both in occupied countries and within Germany itself.<sup>63</sup> His most notable and courageous speech came in opposition to the obliteration bombing of German cities. In February 1944 he appealed in the first instance to the articles and pronouncements by the government that Britain disowned the kind of indiscriminate bombing it had now

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<sup>61</sup> See Andrew Chandler, 'Munich and morality: the bishops of the Church of England and appeasement', *Twentieth-century British history* 5 (1994), pp. 89-90.

<sup>62</sup> *Fortnightly Review*, November 1939, reproduced in G.K.A. Bell, *The Church and humanity, 1939-1946* (London, 1946), pp. 22-31. See also, Andrew Chandler, 'Christian responsibility and the preservation of civilisation in wartime: George Bell and the fate of Germany in World War II', in Peter Stone (ed.), *Cultural heritage, ethics and the military* (Woodbridge, 2011), pp. 55-69.

<sup>63</sup> Bell's first contribution to the House was in 1938, when he introduced a debate on German and Austrian refugees. *HL Deb.* 110, cc. 1206-49, 27 Jul. 1938.

embarked upon. In 1944, he appealed to the peers to recognise and maintain the distinction between the German people and the Nazi government. In brutalising the population and arbitrarily destroying the bastions of German culture – great libraries, universities and museums – the Allies not only undermined the German domestic opposition to the Nazi regime, but also the ethical case for the war.<sup>64</sup> Such interventions against the grain of political will and public sentiment inevitably came to nothing, but they were widely respected for their independent and principled nature.<sup>65</sup>

To varying extents, Henson's and Bell's contributions on foreign policy were affirmations of their continuing sense of responsibility to the nation's Christian values. Yet, they were also expressions of personal ethical and moral vision. Bell had a sense of universal Christian responsibility, above and beyond the practical requirements of the state, while Henson was clear about the essential amorality of totalitarianism. Neither had much concern for the limitations and expediencies under which politicians necessarily laboured.

Henson's and Bell's contributions to foreign matters were indicative of a broader trend for the parliamentary bishops to speak on the basis of their own individual Christian consciences. During a debate on the persecution of Christians in Russia in February 1930, for example, Pollock claimed not to speak as an Anglican bishop *per se*, but 'primarily as a plain Christian man, a plain man'.<sup>66</sup> It was on this

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<sup>64</sup> *HL Deb.* 130, cc. 737-46, 9 Feb. 1944. See also Andrew Chandler, 'The Church of England and the obliteration bombing of Germany in the Second World War', *English historical review* 108 (1993), esp. pp. 924-5, 929-31, 937-41.

<sup>65</sup> Lord Pakenham remarked that '[t]here was no one to whose speeches were followed with a closer, or at times more painful attention'. '[T]hey were', he continued, 'so tremendously irritating, and so acutely provocative'. Andrew Chandler, "'The Church and humanity': George Bell and the life of the Church in the twentieth century", in Andrew Chandler (ed.), *The Church and humanity: the life and work of George Bell, 1883-1958* (Farnham, 2012), p. 22.

<sup>66</sup> *HL Deb.* 76, c. 580, 13 Feb. 1930.

account that there was no discernible change in the patterns of episcopal contributions as different governments – coalition, Conservative, Labour, and National – rose and fell. The bench lacked a clear political agenda and thus a collective purpose. As Henson noted during the debate on the Trade Disputes and Trade Union Bill, ‘I have no interest in the Government, I stand outside politics, but I cannot shut my eyes’.<sup>67</sup>

The Lords Spiritual’s tendency to contribute to parliamentary matters based on either personal insight or ecclesiastical and pastoral experience was openly acknowledged by the Archbishop of Canterbury. In debating the 1934 proposals to reform the House of Lords, Lang conceded that, though it was not stated in any constitutional document that Lords Spiritual were specifically representatives of the Church of England, ‘[i]n point of fact, they may have become so’.<sup>68</sup> He elaborated further in 1937 during the second reading of the Matrimonial Causes Act.

The position occupied by the Lords Spiritual in this House is, in some ways, rather peculiar, and it has become more peculiar in these modern times, when it is impossible for the great majority of Bishops to be absent from their dioceses for more than comparatively short periods together, so that our opportunity of taking part in the general business of the House is greatly curtailed. Consequently, we have become more and more representatives here of the Church of England. Whether it is desirable to have that special representation may be open to debate; but while we hold our places here it must be in that special representative capacity.<sup>69</sup>

It was an acknowledgement that on those occasions when most bishops might desire to appear in the chamber, it was inevitably when a matter of direct ecclesiastical

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<sup>67</sup> *HL Deb.* 68, c. 134, 5 Jul. 1927.

<sup>68</sup> *HL Deb.* 92, c. 257, 10 May 1934.

<sup>69</sup> *HL Deb.* 105, cc. 781-2, 24 Jun. 1937.

concern, or one which resonated with a bishop's particular diocesan experience or their Christian conscience, arose.

On the rare occasions when the bishops claimed the authority to speak for the other British Christian churches, it was usually in circumstances where this had been directly conferred by cross-church organisations and committees. Such was the case during Kempthorne's debate in March 1924 on juvenile unemployment. Although he acknowledged he was no expert, he had brought the matter before the House based on the recommendation of the Lord Privy Seal, J.R. Clynes, to the multi-denominational committee he chaired on unemployment. On such questions of social wellbeing, Kempthorne claimed, 'Christian people of all sorts and all Churches do act together most cordially and most effectively'.<sup>70</sup>

Interestingly, while Lang had recognised that most bishops restrained themselves to speaking in terms of a personal Christianity and of their Anglican experience, this was not a limitation which he applied to himself. Contrary to the trend, the Archbishop of Canterbury's function in the chamber rested on his identity both as a member of the political elite, and his growing ability to speak authoritatively for the British churches; the primate's 'national' role remained deeply associated with his role in the institutions of the state, but increasingly assumed an ecumenical dimension.

The challenge from political nonconformity having abated, a much more ecumenical atmosphere pervaded. COPEC was, after all, not only a watershed in the development of Christian social thinking, but also a pioneering venture in interdenominational co-operation. It was, as Temple commented at the time, 'the

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<sup>70</sup> *HL Deb.* 56, c. 856, 19 Mar. 1924.

biggest manifestation of such unity hitherto'.<sup>71</sup> Movements in the direction of common action had been made at the World Missionary Conference in 1910 – though significant progress only manifested during and after the war – and in 1920, the Lambeth Conference issued a call for Christian reunion in its 'Appeal to all Christian people'. In this new co-operative atmosphere, the Archbishop of Canterbury filled an essential role in facilitating collective action. In arranging the issuing of joint days of prayer and statements from religious leaders on industrial, social, political, imperial and international crises, the archbishop and Lambeth Palace served as a point of central organisation, enabling the various churches and religious leaders to reach consensus and co-ordinate their action.

These initiatives peaked in January 1936 with the publication of 'The Way of Peace'. The statement, which affirmed that with the failure of treaties and pacts between nations only adherence to Christian belief and principle could secure peace was signed by the leaders of fifteen foreign churches as well as the Baptist and Congregational Union, the Methodists and Presbyterians of England and Ireland, the Church in Wales, the Church of Scotland, the Scottish Episcopal Church, the Free Church of Scotland, the Church of Ireland and, of course, the Church of England.<sup>72</sup>

Through the Archbishop of Canterbury, the churches gained access to national platforms and political actors. On matters of foreign affairs where the churches acted in public in concert, the archbishop assumed a role in the House of speaking, in effect, for British Christianity.<sup>73</sup> In contrast to the bishops' lack of

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<sup>71</sup> Norman, *Church and society*, p. 279.

<sup>72</sup> Andrew Chandler, 'The judgement of an archbishop: Cosmo Gordon Lang and British foreign policy, 1928-1939', in Keith Robbins and John Fisher (eds.), *Religion and diplomacy: religion and British foreign policy, 1815 to 1941* (Dordrecht, 2010), pp. 201-5. See also, Williamson, 'National days of prayer', pp. 323-66.

<sup>73</sup> As in earlier periods, the archbishop dominated episcopal contributions on foreign, Commonwealth and imperial affairs. Of the thirty-one episcopal contributions to foreign affairs between 1920 and

concern for the indenturing of Chinese labourers in the Transvaal in 1906, Lang was present in the House to ‘express the deep concern of all the Christian Churches in this land’ on the subject of slavery in 1931.<sup>74</sup> Lang took a particularly strong stand on the persecution of Christians and other faiths in Soviet Russia. He made six contributions to such debates in the parliamentary session of 1929-1930 alone. He sought to express the outrage – though tempered by his own estimations of what was politically prudent – of the Christian community in Britain, bringing before the House detailed accounts of the religious persecution in Russia, having received reports from ‘leading representatives of the Orthodox Church, of the Baptist community, [and] of the Jews’.<sup>75</sup> The compulsion Lang felt to articulate common Christian concerns in the House was such that during a debate in 1933 on the treatment of the Jewish community in Germany he thought he would have been ‘somewhat lacking’ if he did not speak, ‘representing as in some sense I may claim to do the Christian citizenship of the country’.<sup>76</sup>

The potency of Lang’s interventions relied upon the perception of the Archbishop of Canterbury’s continuing place within national political life. It was a role he filled not because of diocesan experience or ecclesiastical authority, but because of his peculiar place at the juncture between the churches and the political agents of the state. The archbishop was a conduit through which specific concerns of the leaders of various churches could be brought before the British political elite.

Lang clearly also still believed he had a role within the parliamentary system as, essentially, an apolitical statesman. He was, for example, an important and highly

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1927, all but three were made by Davidson. Between 1928 and 1939, Lang accounted for more than eight in every ten of the Lords Spiritual’s interventions in these matters.

<sup>74</sup> *HL Deb.* 81, c. 1020, 22 Jul. 1931.

<sup>75</sup> *HL Deb.* 76, c. 1132, 2 Apr. 1930.

<sup>76</sup> *HL Deb.* 87, c. 225, 30 Mar. 1933.



active member of the 1933 Joint Select Committee on Indian Constitutional Reform. However, he participated not as a representative for India's Christian or religious communities, but rather as a responsible but politically independent member of the established order. He claimed a right to be involved in such a matter as

I do not think it is consistent with the tradition of the office which I hold either in this House or in the public life of the country, to let it be supposed that it is concerned only with ecclesiastical matters or even only with matters of direct religious interest.<sup>77</sup>

He had a role as a non-partisan broker, a disinterested statesman who might help smooth party-political divisions. 'It seemed to me', he continued during the debate on the committee's recommendations, 'that there was a place on such a Committee for one member who is wholly independent of any political Party'.<sup>78</sup>

R.H. Tawney noted that the changing political and religious context of the inter-war period allowed the Church of England to become something like 'the religious aspect of the whole nation'.<sup>79</sup> Within parliament, this much might be said of the Archbishop of Canterbury. Lang's emerging role as the spokesman for British Christianity found crucial expression in the House of Lords. His continued place within the broader political elite was balanced by his role as the 'voice' of British Christianity, serving at times to increase significantly the political importance of his participation in parliament.

Yet in general, this was a period during which the political significance of the bishops' parliamentary bench declined, as indeed did the significance of the House of Lords for churchmen. This was not a result of the House's power being

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<sup>77</sup> *HL Deb.* 95, c. 309, 13 Dec. 1934.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>79</sup> Quoted in Green, 'Survival and autonomy', p. 308.

diminished, but of the Church's changing role in the nation. Its institutional relationship with the state no longer seriously challenged, discussion turned towards the revitalisation of the Church's social mission and its role in social life. Although some bishops used their place in the House of Lords to intervene on matters of social welfare, most ceased to recognise parliament as a useful setting for such interventions. It was in the dioceses and ecclesiastical bodies that the Church's mission was formulated and acted upon – as, indeed, the growing local interest in the bishops' contributions suggested.

The bishops' parliamentary conduct was suggestive of a formulation of religious establishment which had come to depend less on its close association with the institutions and agents of the state. The bishops came to understand their role in the nation less as 'statesmen' than as ecclesiastical administrators and leaders. Influence on 'national policy' through participation in parliament was less significant than influence on 'national life' through engagement with local and regional communities.

By the same token, the horizons of the 'national' Church diminished. The Archbishop of Canterbury, it is true, became a more authentically 'national' representative for Christianity, articulating the view of Christian leaders across the United Kingdom. The same cannot be contended for the other Lords Spiritual. They spoke increasingly in terms of their experiences of life in England alone, and particularly for the concerns of those parts of it which were actively involved in the life of the established Church. Though the Church's 'national' role was, in many respects, stronger after the war than before, in parliament the Lords Spiritual had rarely been so limited in their outlook.

## 4. Declining significance: ecclesiastical and parliamentary reform in the inter-war period

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Despite the absence of a serious political challenge to the religious establishment after 1920, the bishops' conduct during the inter-war period was a testament to a change in Church leaders' understanding of their 'national' role. Two notable shifts in the Lords Spiritual's interventions in parliament are worth considering further: the increasingly prominent ecclesiastical aspect to the bishops' function in the House, and their declining importance in the party-political conflict. These trends were not entirely discrete, but rather indicative of the growing sense among many influential churchmen of the distinction between the Church's responsibility to 'the nation', and its function in the political state.

This chapter will examine these changes in two ways. First, given the bishops' growing tendency to intervene in parliament only on issues directly relating to Church governance and administration, the patterns and purpose of ecclesiastical reform in the 1920s will be considered. The second part of the chapter will explain the bishops' changing place in discussions of reform of the House of Lords as a means of inferring the changes in parliamentary dynamics which served to diminish the Lords Spiritual's political significance.

### 4.1. Ecclesiastical reform

The direct cause for the parliamentary bishops' focus on ecclesiastical matters was the granting of a measure of self-government for the Church of England in 1919. The

Assembly<sup>1</sup> served a purpose beyond the purely administrative; it was to reinvigorate the Church's ministry, enabling it to provide a better moral and spiritual lead for its followers. These were the objectives of influential members of the extended Cecil family – Lord Hugh Cecil and Viscount Wolmer in particular – who used their influence in the machinery of Church and state to pursue their ends. The changes they envisaged necessitated a reconfiguration of episcopal priorities. The bishops were drawn away from the national parliamentary platform, and more intimately tied to the instruments and processes of diocesan administration and central ecclesiastical governance. In such a way, the prominence of their role providing a spiritual lead to their clergy and parishioners would be increased. The bishops would become less prelatial 'statesmen' than 'Fathers in God'.

The Enabling Act itself has generally been regarded as essentially an administrative triumph, a victory for the steady pragmatism of Archbishop Davidson.<sup>2</sup> However, in the terms of those leading the popular movement for ecclesiastical self-government, the Assembly which resulted has been regarded as a failure.<sup>3</sup> Led charismatically by William Temple and Dick Sheppard, the Life and Liberty movement sought nothing less than '[t]o win for the Church the liberty essential to fullness of life'.<sup>4</sup> Its leaders were responding to the concern that the Church had failed to appeal to working-class people. Such beliefs were hardly new,

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<sup>1</sup> Initially known as the 'National Assembly', it was renamed during the 1920s as the 'Church Assembly'. For clarity, the representative body of the Church of England vested with ecclesiastical authority under the 1919 Church of England (Assembly) Powers Act will be referred to simply as 'the Assembly' or 'the Church Assembly'.

<sup>2</sup> See G.K.A. Bell, *Randall Davidson, Archbishop of Canterbury*, 2 vols. (London, 1935; 2nd edn. 1938), II, pp. 956-80; Gary Graber, 'Reforming ecclesiastical self-government within the establishment: the Enabling Act, 1919', in Thomas Power (ed.), *Change and transformation: essays in Anglican history* (Eugene, OR, 2013), pp. 223-38; David Thompson, 'The politics of the Enabling Act (1919)', in D. Baker (ed.), *Church, society and politics*, studies in Church history 12 (Oxford, 1975), pp. 383-92.

<sup>3</sup> See, for example, Kenneth Thompson, *Bureaucracy and Church reform: the organisational response of the Church of England to social change, 1800-1965* (Oxford, 1970), pp. 174-202.

<sup>4</sup> Bell, *Davidson*, II, p. 961-2. See also notice in *Times*, 20 Jun. 1917.

but had been given new lease of life by the experience of the war.<sup>5</sup> Through the attainment of ecclesiastical self-government, it was hoped that the Church of England might better engage with these communities by bringing them into its representative bodies. The Church's spiritual life might thereby be rejuvenated, and its social mission better realised.<sup>6</sup>

In terms of including working-class people in the life of the Church, the Act was undoubtedly a failure. The Assembly did not prove – at least, initially – to be a vibrant forum in which to debate the crucial social and economic issues of the day. It failed to catalyse or facilitate any change in the locus of ecclesiastical power. Despite providing for the representation of the laity and clergy in ecclesiastical government, it actually had the effect of further concentrating power in the hands of a coterie of senior bishops, higher clergy, and patrician laymen.<sup>7</sup> The Enabling Act had been presented to parliament as a mundane administrative reform; ‘and thus it proved to be’.<sup>8</sup>

The focus in the historical literature on the objectives of Life and Liberty is, however, undue. It is a result of Temple's later prominence and the intellectual impact of COPEC.<sup>9</sup> The movement for self-government was far broader. It included many influential churchmen who, though they shared a sense of the Church's

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<sup>5</sup> Thompson, *Bureaucracy*, ch. 6; Frances Knight, ‘Internal Church Reform, 1850-1920: an age of innovation in ecclesiastical reform’, in Paula Yates and Joris van Eijnatten (eds.), *Dynamics of religious reform in northern Europe 1780-1920: II, the churches* (Leuven, 2010), p. 68.

<sup>6</sup> It was no coincidence that the leaders of Life and Liberty were closely associated with the social radical movement which Temple came to embody. Indeed, in many ways, Life and Liberty laid the ground for Temple's 1924 COPEC initiative, which set the agenda for the Church's involvement in social questions. E.R. Norman, *Church and society in England 1770-1970: a historical study* (Oxford, 1976), pp. 272-5.

<sup>7</sup> Thompson, *Bureaucracy*, p. 168, 179-202; John D. Zimmerman, ‘A chapter in English church reform: the Enabling Act of 1919’, *Historical magazine of the Protestant Episcopal Church* 46 (1977), p. 225; David Cannadine, *Decline and fall of the British aristocracy* (London, 1990), pp. 494-8.

<sup>8</sup> Adrian Hastings, *A history of English Christianity 1920-2000* (London, 2001), pp. 62-3.

<sup>9</sup> See also comments of Alan Wilkinson, *The Church of England and the First World War* (London, 1978; 3rd edn. 2014), pp. 271-4.

atrophy, located the failure in its ministration. For these reformers, the Enabling Act and Assembly provided the means by which clearer spiritual leadership could be secured, not least through the remodelling of the episcopal office. The bishops were to be drawn away from the national platform and the various secular influences and compromises it entailed, and increasingly tied to their dioceses. They were to be less the patrician prelates familiar to Victorian England, than ‘Fathers in God’, overseeing and managing clerical and lay life.<sup>10</sup>

Certainly, disquiet at the ecclesiastical effects of the bishops’ involvement with the institutions of national politics was not uncommon among churchmen, particularly among those engaged in the debate about the nature of the Church’s responsibility to the national community.<sup>11</sup> The Archdeacon of Ely, William Cunningham, had written to Viscount Bryce, chair of the 1917 conference on Lords reform, to make him aware ‘of the strong feeling there is among many of the clergy in favour of removing the Bishops entirely from the House of Lords’.<sup>12</sup> For Cunningham, and the clergy and correspondents for whom he claimed to speak, the frequent ‘calls to Westminster’ had lured the bishops away from their dioceses and their ‘proper’ episcopal task.

Cunningham’s desire for the reduction, if not the removal, of the parliamentary bishops was part of a broader manifesto of a new ‘National Party’ for the post-war world in which government policy would not be held hostage to sectional interests, whether they be party-political, commercial, ideological or

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<sup>10</sup> Tractarians had, of course, championed increased episcopal authority in the dioceses in the late nineteenth century. Archbishop Benson was dismayed at the notion that the bishops would be too occupied in their dioceses to engage in national institutions. The episcopate would ‘be reduced to the level of Diocesan Inspectorship’. See Arthur Christopher Benson, *The life of Edward White Benson, sometime Archbishop of Canterbury* (London, 1899), II, p. 203; Thompson, *Bureaucracy*, pp. 96-7.

<sup>11</sup> Norman, *Church and society*, pp. 243-4.

<sup>12</sup> Cunningham to Bryce, 13 Dec. 1917, Bry. 251/27-8.

religious. If the Church was to contribute to this process, it too had to be freed from the influence of such interests. In engaging with – and indeed, representing – acute sectional interests within parliament before the war, the bishops had undermined the Church's role in this respect.<sup>13</sup>

Cunningham was not atypical in his belief that a revival of Church life required a remodelling the episcopal office. Crucially, it was a belief shared by Lord Hugh Cecil and Viscount Wolmer. Both were members of the extended Cecil family who bridged the worlds of politics and ecclesiastical governance, and were influential in determining the form which Church self-government would take. Indeed, it was Wolmer in 1913 who, along with Lord Halifax and Sir Alfred Cripps, had requested that a committee into legislative devolution be established.<sup>14</sup> The resulting Church and State Commission which reported in 1916 was chaired by Wolmer's father, Selborne, and was so replete with members of the Cecil family and their associates that Henson noted its atmosphere 'was not so much national as domestic'.<sup>15</sup> Life and Liberty may have created a popular movement for ecclesiastical self-government, but it was the report of Selborne's committee upon which the Enabling Act was based.<sup>16</sup>

Henson, usually perceptive, suggested in his autobiography that Wolmer and Hugh Cecil sought ecclesiastical self-government on a 'political' basis – that is to say, they were instrumentalists, simply desiring better administrative machinery for the passing of Church legislation.<sup>17</sup> Both had far grander intentions. For Wolmer, the cause of the laity's 'lukewarm' churchmanship and 'vague' religious belief was

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<sup>13</sup> *Church Family Newspaper*, 7 Sept. 1917.

<sup>14</sup> Bell, *Davidson*, II, pp. 956-8; Thompson, 'Politics of the Enabling Act', p. 384.

<sup>15</sup> *Edinburgh Review*, Oct. 1916.

<sup>16</sup> Thompson, *Bureaucracy*, pp. 164-70.

<sup>17</sup> Hensley Henson, *Retrospect of an unimportant life*, 3 vols. (London, 1943), I, p. 206.

found in the ineffective ministering of the parish clergy. If the Church's work and its appeal to communities was to be improved, a restructuring of ecclesiastical roles was required. Much was to be gained, Wolmer reasoned, if the bishops could be encouraged to supervise, actively and closely, ministration and spiritual instruction at a local level.<sup>18</sup>

He envisaged further changes in the organisation of parish life which, in various ways, necessitated a significant increase in episcopal involvement in Church life in their dioceses. The clergy, Wolmer supposed, had become overly burdened with the minutiae of parish organisation and financial management. They were simply unable to focus properly on their ministry. If the clergy was to be liberated, parishioners, Wolmer's thinking proceeded, needed to assume a greater responsibility for local Church administration. He proposed they should be keenly encouraged to engage in the spiritual life of their parish, assuming a role in the selection and assessment of their minister.

Such changes necessarily required greater episcopal involvement at a local level. Revitalised parishes would have a just claim to consult the diocesan on matters affecting local spiritual life, and be able in extreme circumstances to call upon episcopal arbitration in conflicts between the laity and incumbent.<sup>19</sup> 'Things have got to be done', Wolmer noted in a letter to Lord Midleton, 'someone must do them. It all boils down to the Bishop in the end'.<sup>20</sup>

Hugh Cecil shared Wolmer's concerns at the poor spiritual leadership in the Church. In fact, he was far more critical. Cecil's churchmanship was idiosyncratic

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<sup>18</sup> Wolmer to Midleton, 22 Feb. 1921, Selb. 3 Eng. Hist. 990/119-32.

<sup>19</sup> Wolmer paper to Church Congress, October 1920, Selb. 3 MS Eng. Hist. 990/33-44.

<sup>20</sup> Wolmer to Midleton, 22 Feb. 1921, Selb. 3 Eng. Hist. 990/119-32.



and his views were often unpredictable, but his fanatical devotion to High Church moral causes was clear.<sup>21</sup> The bishops' apparent lack of scriptural and doctrinal firmness in these matters, or so Cecil believed, had undermined the Church's mission and its spiritual influence by muddying the Christian message. The bishops had proven themselves far too reluctant to articulate traditional Christian beliefs with clarity, and were highly susceptible to pernicious external influences. Their concern to maintain the 'comprehensiveness' of the Church, despite the fact that many in society no longer adhered to strict Christian precepts, had led them to compromise their role as spiritual leaders.<sup>22</sup> Time and again, they had yielded Christian principles 'to the winds of public opinion or the authority of the state or the fashion of the hour'.<sup>23</sup> Such had been confirmed by their lack of firmness over, for example, the question of the state permitting a man to marry his deceased wife's sister.<sup>24</sup> In the contest between principles and pragmatism, the bishops seemed far too willing to accede to the practical requirements of the state and public opinion. 'I cannot remember any instance', Hugh Cecil claimed, 'in which the Bishops have shown real courage and independence of public opinion and manful adherence to an unpopular principle'.<sup>25</sup> If the spiritual leadership of the Church was to be restored, the bishops needed to be less concerned with the national platform, and more concerned with the promotion of 'authentic' Christian values and beliefs within the Church itself.

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<sup>21</sup> Hugh Cecil, 'My religious position. Confidential', undated (c. 1920), LQP Box 6/26/138-72.

<sup>22</sup> Although Hugh Cecil makes little impression on the work of E.R. Norman, it is interesting to note how similar many of Cecil's views and Norman's arguments about the nature of the Anglican episcopate are.

<sup>23</sup> In an impassioned letter to the Bishop of Chelmsford about this and other issues relating to the Church's spiritual leaders, Cecil went so far as to moot schism. Hugh Cecil to Ditchfield, 5 Mar. 1919, LQP Box 6/25/75-82.

<sup>24</sup> 'Questions arising out of the discrepancy between the law of the state and the rules of the Church in respect to marriage', LQP Box 22/26/1-3; Part of memo. on marriage to a brother's widow, LQP Box 22/44/1-7.

<sup>25</sup> Hugh Cecil to Ditchfield, 5 Mar. 1919, LQP Box 6/25/75-82.

The restoration of the Church's spiritual leadership required for the bishops to be drawn more closely into the spiritual and administrative life of the Church itself. This lay behind Cecil's and Wolmer's support and use of the Assembly. It was embodied best in their interest in creation of new dioceses, the 'foundation stone of Church Reform' according to Wolmer.<sup>26</sup> The large episcopal sees of English tradition were not only expensive to administer, but made it impossible for bishops to be deeply involved in diocesan life. In such dioceses, Wolmer argued in a memorandum to Assembly members '[l]eadership is impeded, corporate life is thwarted, [and] supervision is defective'. 'If all is not well with the Church of England', he continued,

that we have allowed effective Episcopal supervision to cease to be possible, and have consequently very largely deprived the Episcopate of its pastoral function, must surely be counted among the causes.<sup>27</sup>

Hugh Cecil argued that as many as 150 dioceses might be necessary. Further still, the bishops needed to be aided by two archdeacon suffragans each to ensure that their personal contact with their clergy and laity could be maintained.<sup>28</sup>

For Hugh Cecil and Wolmer, the purpose of ecclesiastical self-government was not to facilitate the reassertion of the Church's social mission through the empowerment of the laity. They were quite content for the institutions of Church governance to remain, as indeed they continued to, in the hands of traditional patrician elites like themselves.<sup>29</sup> Rather, they sought to reinvigorate Church life

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<sup>26</sup> Wolmer to Middleton, 22 Feb. 1921, Selb. 3 Eng. Hist. 990/119-32.

<sup>27</sup> 'To the members of the National Assembly of the Church of England: an appeal from members representing the Winchester diocese in favour of the Winchester Diocese (Division) Measure, 1923', undated (1923), Selb. 3 Eng. Hist. 990/156-62.

<sup>28</sup> National Assembly of the Church of England, *Report of proceedings* 2(2), summer session 1922, 30 Jun. 1922, p. 116.

<sup>29</sup> Lang came to refer to Hugh Cecil as 'the power behind the throne' of the Assembly. Hastings, *History of English Christianity*, p. 64; Thompson, *Bureaucracy*, pp. 200-1.

through the strengthening of its spiritual leadership and the clearer articulation of Christian moral principles. The implications for the bishops' role in the House of Lords were clear. If the bishops were to provide effective spiritual leadership, they needed to be less concerned with national matters outside of the ecclesiastical authority of the Church. Participation in parliament had only drawn them away from their 'proper' ecclesiastical vocation, and encouraged them to act as 'statesmen', weighing clear moral leadership against their sense of what was politically judicious.

At the inception of the Assembly, Wolmer and Cecil lost no time in advancing their cause, and they were exceptionally well-placed to carry it into action. 'Parliament expects great Church Reform under the Enabling Act', Wolmer told diocesan colleagues in 1920, 'and I think we should not be slow in coming forward with a definite policy'.<sup>30</sup> From the start, Selborne, Wolmer and Cecil were all intimately involved in establishing the Assembly's procedures and process, and they assumed influential positions within its organisational structure. Cecil became chair of the Standing Orders Committee which, in liaison with the Assembly's secretary, Sir Philip Wilbraham, drafted the new institution's rules. Wolmer meanwhile became chairman of the 'Committee on the constitution of diocesan and ruridecanal conferences'.<sup>31</sup>

While the advent of the Assembly increased the weight of ecclesiastical business in parliament, the burden did not fall on the Lords Spiritual. Paradoxically,

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<sup>30</sup> Wolmer to Firth, 19 Jan. 1920, Selb. 3 Eng. Hist. 990/4.

<sup>31</sup> Positions occupied by the extended Cecil family at the inception of the Assembly included: Hugh Cecil, chairman of the 'Committee on standing orders'; Selborne, chairman of 'Committee to consider the scope and character of an enquiry into Church property and finance'; Selborne, chairman of 'Committee on relations between the National Assembly and Central Board of Finance'; Selborne, chairman of 'Joint committee of the Central Board of Finance and the National Assembly to consider the financial position'; Wolmer, chairman of 'Committee on the constitution of diocesan and ruridecanal conferences'.

In 1924, Selborne became chairman of the House of Laity, and in 1925 chairman of Central Board of Finance.

while the number of episcopal interventions in the House on Church issues grew, their responsibility for ensuring the passage of Church measures through parliament diminished. The Assembly's patrician lay leaders, Wolmer in particular, assumed this responsibility. His efforts in lobbying parliamentarians had already been crucial in securing the passage of the Enabling Act. His 'Church Self-Government Association' had collected the names of 20,000 churchmen, indexed according to their constituency, who could be relied upon to extract pledges from candidates during the 1918 general election in support of ecclesiastical self-government.<sup>32</sup> By the time the bill reached the House of Commons, Wolmer had secured the support of some 177 MPs.<sup>33</sup>

As chair of the Central Church Committee for Church Defence and Church Instruction from 1920, and having secured 'a very free hand' in its organisation, Wolmer hoped to continue his work in support of Assembly measures.<sup>34</sup> Although ultimately nothing came of the initiative, he remained deeply involved in the informal organisation of support in parliament. In preparing for a lobbying campaign to secure the passage of the Winchester division measure through the Commons, for example, he again created an index of MPs, their position on the proposals, and, if necessary, what assurances they required.<sup>35</sup>

As a corollary of this, though the Lords Spiritual might need to attend the chamber to speak in support of Church measures, they were not called upon to engage in the time-consuming and spiritually-distracting lobbying of

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<sup>32</sup> Selb. 3 Eng. Hist. 989/*passim*; Wolmer to Partridge, 29 May 1924, Selb. 3 Eng. Hist. 990/166-9.

<sup>33</sup> Selb. 3 Eng. Hist. 988/*passim*; Selb. 3 Eng. Hist. 989/*passim*; Hugh Cecil to Davidson, 10 Nov. 1919, DP 256/256; Thompson, 'Politics of the Enabling Act', p. 389.

<sup>34</sup> Wolmer to Iremonger, 9 Jul. 1920, Selb. 3 Eng. Hist. 990/25-7.

<sup>35</sup> Wolmer 'supplementary list' of MPs, undated [1925], Selb. 3 Eng. Hist. 990/187. See also Wolmer's efforts to convince sceptical peers, Wolmer to Darling, 11 Jul. 1924, Selb. 3 Eng. Hist. 990/173-7.

parliamentarians. It was Cecil and Wolmer who mapped out the parliamentary strategies for passing Church measures. Cecil, for example, entered into lengthy correspondence about the Clergy Pensions Measure of 1926 with Davidson to establish when it might best be brought before parliament. Failure to pass the measure in the soon-to-end parliamentary session would result in its operation being delayed for some six months, depriving some 200 clergy of their pensions. Cecil advised an immediate introduction into the Lords, and for the scheme to be cast as part of that ‘uncontroversial business’ which ‘scuttles through’ parliament in the days before recess.<sup>36</sup>

Episcopal leaders increasingly came to rely on such tactical advice. With the rejection of the Episcopal Pension Measure in 1926 by the Ecclesiastical Committee, both archbishops – if somewhat reluctantly – deferred to the advice of Cecil and other leading lay churchmen to delay part of the measure in order to secure the passage of the rest. After all, as Lang related to Davidson, it was ‘a matter about which one can only take the advice of our friends in Parliament’.<sup>37</sup>

Cecil and Wolmer had assumed the responsibility, which might rightly have fallen to the bishops, for the passage of Church measures through parliament. However, the fortunes of the legislation they promoted to alter the horizons of the episcopal office were mixed. Notably, their attempt to multiply the number of dioceses eventually stumbled in the face of opposition inspired by certain bishops.<sup>38</sup> Nevertheless, the Enabling Act machinery and the advent of the Assembly had a profound effect on the conduct of the episcopate. The time of the parliamentary

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<sup>36</sup> Hugh Cecil to Davidson, undated [July 1926], DP 210/250-1.

<sup>37</sup> Lang to Davidson, 5 Aug. 1926, DP 208/349. See also Wolmer’s correspondence with Lang regarding the Patronage Measure, Wolmer to Lang, 15 Dec. 1930, Selb. 3 MS Eng. Hist. c. 992/148; Lang to Wolmer, 16 Dec. 1930, Selb. 3 MS Eng. Hist. c. 992/149.

<sup>38</sup> See chapter 5.

bishops became consumed by the increasing burdens of diocesan and Assembly administration. Participation in the House of Lords – and indeed, in the wider social existence of the political elite – became incidental, even a hindrance, to the effective discharge of episcopal responsibilities.

In the first place, the basic functioning of the new Assembly required wide-ranging diocesan reorganisation. The Enabling Act did not create and constitute a ‘National Assembly of the Church of England’, but rather invested such a body with power; it was drafted on the assumption that the Assembly was already in existence, when it was not. Immediately then, a great deal of pressure was placed on the episcopate to ensure that the Assembly could be constituted, with elections held to Ruridecanal and Diocesan Conferences, most of which did not yet exist at the start of 1920. The Convocations also required reform, and a further set of elections needed to be arranged for the Parochial Church Councils (PCCs). Establishing such apparatus ready for the first sitting of the Assembly in 1920 constituted a huge drain on episcopal time.

Even once the Assembly was up and running, the pressure did not relent. It fell to the bishops to ensure that the nascent ecclesiastical institutions and processes operated effectively and consistently within the rapidly developing legal framework. At the regular Bishops’ Meetings, time was increasingly consumed with discussion of the various administrative and disciplinary ambiguities which were emerging. The great majority of these issues involved episcopal authority over uncooperative incumbents and PCCs.<sup>39</sup> These operational and disciplinary concerns continued to increase through to the middle of the decade. For example, in 1924 Ernest Pearce of

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<sup>39</sup> See, for example, Bishops’ Meeting, 2-3 Feb. 1922, BM 7/227-48; Bishops’ Meeting, 15-16 May 1923, BM 7/319-37.

Worcester raised the uncertain legal recourse available when an incumbent had failed to carry out the provisions of the Parochial Church Councils (Powers) Measure. So unclear was the issue that the meeting agreed that an episcopal committee should be formed to clarify the matter, chaired by Pearce and consisting of the bishops of Bristol and Bradford.<sup>40</sup>

As the 1920s proceeded, episcopal time away from the diocese became an encumbrance. Yet the burden of central ecclesiastical work also continued to mount. What time bishops could spare in London was increasingly devoted to central ecclesiastical matters. In the first five years of the Assembly's operation, thirteen measures received the Royal Assent – including those dealing with contested matters on Parochial Church Councils, the division of episcopal sees, and the revision of the Lectionary – and three further measures awaited approval by the Ecclesiastical Committee. The Assembly had also passed three Regulations<sup>41</sup> and embarked on extensive discussions of Church budgets and finance, divorce, missionary work, education, and the appointment of bishops. Convocation, of course, continued to meet periodically.

All this required, in one way or another, episcopal attention – to which had to be added the participation of the bishops in the work of the Assembly's committees. Of its five permanent committees, four in 1920 were chaired by diocesan bishops. The episcopate was also called to participate in the growing number of committees called on an *ad hoc* basis in response to specific ecclesiastical and, particularly later in the decade, social concerns. Of the twenty-four committees appointed during the

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<sup>40</sup> Bishops' Meeting, 13 Feb. 1924, BM 8/2-21.

<sup>41</sup> A means of passing minor Church legislation without the need for Parliament's approval.

first two years of the Assembly's operation, eight were chaired by diocesan bishops.<sup>42</sup>

Even when committee work did not directly involve the episcopate, preparing for Assembly debates made demands on episcopal time. Episcopal committees were often called to prepare the bishops for forthcoming Assembly business. For example, in 1924 the Commission on the Revenues and Property of the Church was to recommend a special Commission of the Assembly to consider the legal relation between a bishop and his cathedral. On learning of this, the bishops appointed an episcopal committee, chaired by Bishop Nickson of Bristol and consisting of the bishops of Salisbury, Worcester, Truro, Sheffield, and Gloucester, to establish the concerns of the bench.<sup>43</sup> The first five items on the agenda for the Bishops' Meeting of June 1925 concerned reports of committees of various kinds, while other items considered resolutions to be put to the Assembly on the Church ownership of mining royalties and an Assembly committee on the widows and orphans of the clergy.<sup>44</sup>

Such were the diocesan demands made on the bishops that by the middle of the decade they were openly expressing their reluctance to travel to London. At the Bishops' Meeting of January 1925, Arthur Headlam of Gloucester proposed that the 'Fixed Days' – those on which the central Church business took place – be arranged 'in such a way as to make it possible for the Bishops to come up to London less frequently'.<sup>45</sup> Accordingly, Lang redrafted the Fixed Days for 1926, arranging the

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<sup>42</sup> For example, the Bishops of Durham and Bristol participated in the Committee of Inquiry into the Finance and Property of the Church, while the Bishop of Gloucester chaired the committee to consider the Reply of Convocation to the Royal Letters of Business.

<sup>43</sup> Bishops' Meeting, 13-14 Feb. 1924, BM 8/2-21.

<sup>44</sup> Bishops' Meeting, 22 Jun. 1926, BM 8/84-97. The Committees were: 'chaplains to institutions'; 'relation of religious communities to diocesan bishops'; 'present position of the question of birth control'; 'on grouping of dioceses for finance and patronage'. The fifth item was entitled 'procedure with reference to the report of the Church Assembly commission on ecclesiastical courts'.

<sup>45</sup> Bishops' Meeting, 29-30 Jan. 1925, BM 8/53-63.



dates for Assembly Committees, the House of Bishops, Assembly plenary sessions, Convocation, and Bishops' Meetings into three blocks, condensing the number of days required in the capital. Even the Bishops' Meetings, which had previously taken place over two days, were reduced to a single day in 1926 and 1927. Episcopal time in London was attenuated, and business in the capital began to revolve around the demands of Church governance.<sup>46</sup>

Hugh Cecil and Wolmer were not able to secure all that they had hoped in changing the horizons of the episcopal office. Wolmer, for example, turned his attention unsuccessfully towards the reform of the prime minister's powers of episcopal patronage.<sup>47</sup> Yet the Assembly had succeeded in minimising the bishops' exposure in London and to the legislature. Even those bishops who eagerly sought a place in parliament found themselves incapable of regular, or even occasional, attendance. Henson wrote of his 'distress' at his inability 'to make more effective use of my right to take part in [House of Lords] debates' and to frequent the clubs to which he had been elected. The increasing demands made on him by his diocese limited his time in London, while the time spent in the capital was dominated by his responsibilities to central ecclesiastical organisations. 'In effect', he wrote, 'I had to choose between Durham and London, and I chose the course which, from a merely selfish point of view, was least attractive'.<sup>48</sup> Henson's comment was telling. The demands of diocesan administration were unavoidable, while participation in non-ecclesiastical matters in London had become an inconvenience; it was a luxury the episcopate could ill-afford.

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<sup>46</sup> See also the comment of the Bishop of Ely on the growing demands of ecclesiastical business in London. Bishops' Meeting, 23-24 Oct. 1929, BM 8/272.

<sup>47</sup> See Wolmer note on the appointment of English bishops, April 1929, Selb. 3 MS Eng. Hist. 992/95.

<sup>48</sup> Henson, *Retrospect*, II, pp. 83-5.

The toll on episcopal time of ecclesiastical business continued to grow through the 1920s, particularly after 1925. With the advancing revision of the Prayer Book, the already hard-pressed episcopate was warned to expect a heavy burden of sittings in the House of Bishops for the following year. The detailed and time-consuming discussions recorded in the minutes of the Bishops' Meetings for 1927 attest to the manner in which the issue became all-consuming.<sup>49</sup> By this time, it was clear that the bishops of the inter-war period shared little of the parliamentary enthusiasm displayed by the occupants of the pre-war bench. It was not a coincidence that at the same Bishops Meeting that Headlam requested the reorganisation of Fixed Days, the bishops also discussed the possibility of disowning their responsibility to deliver prayer at the start of each daily sitting of the House of Lords.<sup>50</sup> Though it might have been unspoken, the implication was clear: for most of the parliamentary bishops, participation in the House of Lords had ceased to have a large place in the conduct of the episcopal office.

## 4.2. House of Lords reform

The advent of a measure of ecclesiastical self-government had reduced the significance for the Church of episcopal participation in parliament. At the same time, the political significance of the Lords Spiritual had also diminished. This is particularly apparent in the bishops' changing place in discussions of reform of the House of Lords. These periodic proposals, usually sponsored by Unionists, were highly suggestive of the changing dynamics of British politics. Discussions of Lords

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<sup>49</sup> Bishops' Meeting, 26-27 Oct. 1927, BM 8/168.

<sup>50</sup> Bishops' Meeting, 29-30 Jan. 1925, BM 8/53-63.

reform responded closely to the competing contemporary concerns for the just representation of the political parties in parliament and for constitutional and parliamentary stability. They were, essentially, highly suggestive of the nature of the party-political conflict and discourse.

As was shown in Chapter 1, in the earlier years of the century, the presence of Lords Spiritual in the House was an important matter of debate. The denominational character of the central party conflict heightened the political and ecclesiastical importance of religious representation in the House of Lords. From one perspective, the Lords Spiritual embodied both the House's best traditions of disinterestedness in party-political conflict. From another, they personified the sectional and partisan interests which dominated the upper chamber.

Yet by the 1920s, the parliamentary bishops had receded entirely from the agenda of House of Lords reform. The preface to the Parliament Act acknowledged that the process of reform was not complete. It envisaged a future bill that might reconstitute the House 'on a popular instead of a hereditary basis' and even reconsider the provisions 'for limiting and defining the powers of the new Second Chamber'.<sup>51</sup> However, reform discussions came to revolve chiefly around restoration of the House's power, rather than the revision of its composition. For reform-minded Unionists, this was imperative, lest a fleeting radical majority in the lower chamber seeking to pass revolutionary legislation attempt to bypass – or worse still, abolish – the constitutional check of the upper chamber.

While earlier reform proposals had sought to affirm the chamber's apolitical character,<sup>52</sup> they now came to focus on the extent of political diversification

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<sup>51</sup> Section 1 and 2 Geo. V c. 13.

<sup>52</sup> See chapter 1 for comment on Lord Rosebery's 1908 committee.

necessary to make a partial restoration of the House's power politically possible. In these discussions, the Lords Spiritual were of incidental importance. Church interests no longer occupied a clear place in the party-political dynamic, and accordingly the Lords Spiritual were of little value in resolving representational issues in the House of Lords. It was telling that when the presence of the parliamentary bishops did provoke debate during discussions of Lords reform, it was as a result of vestigial denominational grievances. Although the disagreements which arose were serious, they were self-contained, running parallel to, though not intersecting with, the crucial lines of debate.

Inspired by the success of the Speaker's Conference on Electoral Reform called in 1916, renewed discussions of Lords reform were set in motion before the war had ended. The Second Chamber Conference chaired by Viscount Bryce, a recognised authority on constitutional law, was tasked with the completion of the process set in motion by the Parliament Act. Its remit was to consider the powers and composition of the upper chamber, and the means by which disagreements between the Houses might be reconciled.<sup>53</sup>

Although Bryce reflected in 1918 that the committee's discussions on the House's composition had proven the 'most difficult', it was on the question of its powers that the committee's discussions turned.<sup>54</sup> Before sittings had begun, the committee's Unionists – which, perhaps unsurprisingly, included Hugh Cecil and Selborne – had already agreed to act in concert to 'insist on the question of powers and the settlement of disputes between the two Houses being settled before we

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<sup>53</sup> Peter Dorey and Alexandra Kelso, *House of Lords reform since 1911: must the Lords go?* (Basingstoke, 2011), p. 34; John D. Fair, *British interparty conferences. a study of the procedure of conciliation in British politics, 1867-1921* (Oxford, 1980), p. 171; Peter Raina, *House of Lords reform: a history* (Bern, 2011), II, pp. 119-21.

<sup>54</sup> 'Letter from Viscount Bryce to the Prime Minister', April 1918, CAB 24/5/8.

proceed to consider the composition of the Second Chamber'.<sup>55</sup> The overriding concern of the Unionists was to secure an effective check on the authority of the Commons.

That is not to suggest that matters of composition were entirely incidental. After all, the future House of Lords would need to retain a conservative character. As such, Cecil refused to support any scheme 'of which a probable consequence should be that there might be a stable party majority for radical reform in the Second Chamber at any time'.<sup>56</sup> However, such considerations were secondary to the restoration of the Lords' ability to limit the agency of the Commons.<sup>57</sup> For the leading Unionists, the chamber's future membership was essentially a bargaining tool; a broadening of the House's political composition was to be bartered against a restoration of its power.<sup>58</sup> 'What I really care about', Selborne acknowledged in heading a deputation of the National Unionist Association to Lloyd George as prime minister, 'are the powers of the new Second Chamber and the repeal of the Parliament Act'.<sup>59</sup> Such compositional compromises as they were willing to make, he emphasised, were 'of course strictly contingent on an agreement as to the powers of the Second Chamber and as to satisfactory arrangements for [settling disagreements between Houses]'.<sup>60</sup>

In this context, the Lords Spiritual could be of little significance. The compositional question revolved around the representation of political interests in the

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<sup>55</sup> Selborne to Hugh Cecil, 18 Aug. 1917, Selb. 2 85/1-2 [underlining in original].

<sup>56</sup> Hugh Cecil to Selborne, 21 Dec. 1917, Selb. 2 85/45-8.

<sup>57</sup> Bryce to Selborne, 5 Aug. 1917, Selb. 2 85/5-6; Fair, *Interparty conferences*, pp. 186-7; H.B. Lees-Smith, 'The Bryce Conference on the reform of the House of Lords', *Economica* 6 (1922), pp. 225-7.

<sup>58</sup> Lansdowne to Bryce, 20 Dec. 1917, Bry. 251/31.

<sup>59</sup> Memo. of deputation of National Unionist Association to the prime minister and Bonar Law, 6 Feb. 1919, Selb. 2 85/95-7.

<sup>60</sup> Selborne to Crewe, 13 Dec. 1917, Selb. 2 85/66-8. For a detailed description of the general proceedings of the Conference, see Lees-Smith, 'Bryce Conference', pp. 220-7; H.B. Lees-Smith, *Second chambers in theory and practice* (London, 1923), esp. pp. 216-35.

future House. The parliamentary bishops might serve as a useful sop to the House's traditions, but they could offer the politicians little in terms of resolving the central compositional issue.

Despite this, Davidson was keen for the Church to be represented at the Conference, and once he had been appointed as one of its members, he approached his responsibilities with diligence and commitment. The Conference's sittings stretched over six months, extending to some forty-eight meetings. Davidson claimed during a later debate on Lords reform to have attended each of the Bryce Conference's 48 sessions; it was an exaggeration, but only just.<sup>61</sup>

Davidson's dependable attendance at the sessions, despite his poor health and growing ecclesiastical burdens,<sup>62</sup> was a testament to the significance that Church leaders continued to afford to their presence in parliament. It was also suggestive of his awareness that the institution of the 'Lords Spiritual' was, though not of great 'political' significance in the discussions, likely nevertheless to be a matter of contention. The Bryce Committee consisted of sixteen Unionists, twelve Liberals (including Bryce himself), two Irish Nationalists, and a Labour representative, as well as Davidson. The members ranged in their views from the staunchest champions of the hereditary peerage to the advocates of single-chamber government.

Within this spectrum opposition to the Lords Spiritual came from stalwarts of traditional Liberal and nonconformists causes, like Charles Hobhouse and Ellis Davies. The 'real heat', according to Davidson, emanated from Sir Thomas Palmer Whittaker, Liberal MP for the Spen Valley.<sup>63</sup> Prominent in the temperance

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<sup>61</sup> *HL Deb.* 51, c. 645, 20 Jul. 1922; Davidson memo., 9 Dec. 1917, DP 13/192-201.

<sup>62</sup> Davidson to Bryce, 12 Feb. 1918, Bry. 251/54.

<sup>63</sup> Davidson memo, 3 Feb. 1918, DP 13/202-4.

movement, it is likely that Whittaker's opposition to the Lords Spiritual emanated at least in part from their comparatively lacklustre support for licensing legislation.<sup>64</sup>

That some opposition to 'Lords Spiritual' would be expressed during the Conference's proceedings was obvious. Before it had even gathered for the first time, Bryce had circulated a memorandum of the subjects on which substantial accord might be assumed; the Lords Spiritual, he noted, could 'hardly be placed among [these] issues'.<sup>65</sup>

Davidson prepared the ground for defence of the parliamentary place of the bishops, making his appeal towards those Unionists on the committee who were concerned at the prospect of unchecked 'radical' majorities in the House of Commons. He affirmed his commitment to upholding the chamber's historical pedigree, endeavouring to do his best 'to secure due respect for the traditions of the House'.<sup>66</sup> Subsequently he referred prominently to the bishops' historical 'reference'; the House of Lords was the oldest constitutional assembly in the world, and its complement of Anglican bishops were, in turn, the chamber's oldest constituent part. To remove the bishops entirely, he concluded, 'would be quite needlessly breaking with the whole past'.<sup>67</sup>

Recognising that discussions on composition had come to revolve around questions of party balance, Davidson also sought to secure the future representation of Lords Spiritual by distancing them from the central question. In his interventions,

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<sup>64</sup> *Times*, 15 Nov. 1919; John Greenaway, 'Whittaker, Sir Thomas Palmer', in Jack Blocker, David Fahey, and Ian Tyrrell (eds.), *Alcohol and temperance in modern history: an international encyclopaedia*, 2 vols. (Santa Barbara, CA, 2003), I, pp. 866-8. For the Lords Spiritual's interventions on licensing and temperance issues, see chapter 1.

<sup>65</sup> Memo. on points of agreement and difference', undated [1917], DP 439/39-40.

<sup>66</sup> Davidson memo., 9 Dec. 1917, DP 13/192-201.

<sup>67</sup> Davidson note 'Bps in Second Chamber', undated [late Jan. 1918], DP 441/3.1-3.2 [underlining in original].

he placed increased emphasis on the bishops' independence and political detachment. In comments no doubt addressed to the Liberal members of the commission, he denied that the Lords Spiritual collectively acted as partisans for Unionist interests. Stretching credulity, and delving somewhat uncharacteristically into hyperbole, he asserted that 'more than half' of the bishops of lesser sees were Liberals, and that some were 'advanced radicals'.<sup>68</sup>

In a final effort to demonstrate a dispassionate, rational assessment of the Lords Spiritual, Davidson made several recommendations for their future representation in the House. From the outset, he made it clear that he did not believe that the Conference should retain 'anything like the present number' of bishops. He was content for the episcopate to comprise two *per cent* of the chamber's membership, a relative reduction by half.<sup>69</sup> He desired the representation of only so many Lords Spiritual as would be required to conduct their independent role in the House effectively, not to strengthen unnecessarily their position for partisan gain. Most importantly, he was willing to concede the method by which Lords Spiritual would be selected. Early on he impressed upon his committee colleagues his 'readiness to accept any mode of choosing' the members of the bishops' parliamentary bench.<sup>70</sup>

Had Davidson realised the extent of the opposition he would ultimately face, it is possible he would have conceded even more. When the committee came to consider the Lords Spiritual in late January 1918, he was clearly caught off-guard. He recorded in his *aide-memoire* that the debate 'almost immediately became bitter

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<sup>68</sup> In fact, the Dod's *Parliamentary Companion* for 1911 identified two Lords Spiritual as Liberals, five as Liberal Unionists, and four as Conservatives: *Dod's Parliamentary Companion* (1911).

<sup>69</sup> Davidson memo., 'Bps in Second Chamber', undated [Late Jan. 1918], DP 441/3.1-3.3.

<sup>70</sup> Davidson memo., 3 Feb. 1918, DP 13/202-4.



and excited'. The meeting descended into 'an exhibition of sectarian heat' for which he was 'quite unprepared'. The objections to continued episcopal representation were of such a vehemence that, most of the report being otherwise agreed, Davidson recorded his concern that the Lords Spiritual 'may turn out in the end a point of controversy so acute as to imperil the unanimity, if that be attainable, of the Report'.<sup>71</sup>

After a lengthy discussion of the role of the parliamentary bishops, Whittaker condemned the decision to make provision for the presence of any Lords Spiritual and called for the committee to adjourn.<sup>72</sup> The archbishop's representations, Whittaker claimed, had been 'perfectly monstrous and intolerable'.<sup>73</sup> Before Whittaker would give way, leading Unionist members and churchmen on the committee, in particular Selborne, Lansdowne and Cecil, were forced to plead the bishops' case, emphasising the spirit of compromise and concession which had marked the committee's discussions.<sup>74</sup>

Davidson's recommendations proved beyond his reach. In the final settlement, provision was made for just five parliamentary bishops, little more than one *per cent* of the proposed future House. Though he moved that the rather meagre number be increased to six, he lost the division by a single vote.<sup>75</sup> The control of party organisations over the composition of the bishops' bench was also increased. Selection of Lords Spiritual would be in the hands of a standing nomination committee of both Houses. It was a patent attempt to minimise the political bias

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<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

<sup>72</sup> Fair, *Interparty conferences*, p. 192.

<sup>73</sup> Davidson memo, 3 Feb. 1918, DP 13/202-4.

<sup>74</sup> Fair, *Interparty conferences*, pp. 192-3.

<sup>75</sup> Whittaker to Bryce, 23 Mar. 1918, Bry. 251/92-3. A marked contrast, of course, to the proceedings of the Rosebery Committee in 1908. See chapter 1.

which various Liberals and nonconformists believed was exhibited by the bishops' bench.<sup>76</sup>

The opposition that Davidson faced was indeed striking. One Liberal member of the committee even protested to Bryce that the majority for retaining the bishops had been so small that 'some members of the Conference who voted for them have since told me that if the point was raised again they should vote for omitting the proviso for including them'.<sup>77</sup> Yet there was also a suggestion that the political controversy about the Lords Spiritual was waning. The greatest opposition to the bishops' parliamentary position had come from the more radical Liberals, who by no means carried their party colleagues with them. John Murray MacDonald and Sir Henry Norman, both Liberal MPs, had appealed to Whittaker to drop his objections so as to allow the committee's discussions to progress.<sup>78</sup>

In 1917, the position of the Lords Spiritual clearly remained a 'live' issue for some radicals. However, as the period progressed it receded entirely from discussions of House of Lords reform. The potency of political nonconformity waned during the war, while the Liberal Party declined under the pressures of warfare, ideological disagreement, and difficulties in adapting to the emerging politics and discourse of class identity. The fears of the reform-minded Unionists, meanwhile, seemed to have been confirmed when Ramsay MacDonald, leader of the Labour Party, was called to form a minority government in January 1924. Though it lacked a specific mandate and could, in all events, only last for nine months, the

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<sup>76</sup> The Joint Standing Committee was to consist of ten people, five chosen from the House of Commons by the Speaker, and five chosen by the Committee of Selection of the Second Chamber (itself composed of twenty members of the House of Lords appointed at the beginning of each Parliament).

<sup>77</sup> Whittaker to Bryce, 23 Mar. 1918, Bry. 251/92-3.

<sup>78</sup> Fair, *Interparty conferences*, p. 192.

existence of a 'socialist' government affirmed the urgency with which the Lords' power needed to be restored. MacDonald's was the party, after all, which had in its 1910 manifesto advocated single chamber government in order to ensure it could pass its political programme – 'THE LORDS MUST GO'.<sup>79</sup>

With increased urgency, Unionist reformers focused on the (at least partial) restoration of the House of Lords' powers. The compositional question revolved ever more tightly around the balance of political representation. The Lords Spiritual became incidental, as both a matter of discussion and an influence on proceedings. The Church was not directly implicated in the struggle between class economic interests which had come to dominate the political discourse, and its bishops could not be unambiguously ranged on either side of the party divide. They warranted little consideration – nor, of course, did they particularly seek it.

Conservative governments appointed two Cabinet Committees during the 1920s to consider the future of the House, one chaired by Lord Curzon in 1922, and another by Lord Cave in 1925. Both possessed a remit to examine the powers and composition of the House, and both unquestioningly accepted the existence of Lords Spiritual as an uncontroversial issue. In contrast to the clashes of December 1917, no member of the Curzon committee dissented from the chairman's statement that he

attached the greatest value to the presence of the Lords Spiritual in the House of Lords. Not only were they the oldest element in the House, but they were able from time to time to make most valuable contributions to the proceedings.<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> Reproduced in Dorey and Kelso, *House of Lords reform*, p. 1. The Labour Party's commitment to abolitionism had been confirmed at two party conferences in 1918 alone. Philip Williamson, 'The Labour Party and the House of Lords, 1918-1931', *Parliamentary history* 10 (1991), p. 318.

<sup>80</sup> House of Lords reform committee meeting conclusions, 14 Nov. 1921, CAB 27/113/2.

Although Curzon initially raised the parliamentary bishops as a matter for discussion, the committee never returned to the subject.<sup>81</sup>

Not only were the Lords Spiritual now uncontroversial, they had become incidental. In marked contrast to the precedent set in previous decades, neither of the Curzon and Cave committees sought episcopal advice. In drawing up their recommendations for the composition of the future chamber, neither devised a clear scheme for religious representation. The Curzon Committee simply noted that the reformed House *should* include Lords Spiritual, leaving their number, the manner of their appointment – and, indeed, their denomination – unspecified. Cave meanwhile ventured only a modicum further, suggesting that the Lords Spiritual should continue to sit, albeit ‘in reduced numbers’.

Ultimately, detailed schemes of the religious representation in the House could contribute little to the restoration of the House’s power. The Lords Spiritual had ceased to occupy any important place in the conduct of party politics. Yet this was also a form of strength; the continued representation of the Church in the House of Lords was taken for granted. Indeed, Davidson used the opportunity of the debates on reform proposals in the 1920s to cast off any vestige of the perception that the bishops occupied a reactionary position in the House of Lords. He claimed instead a place for himself, and by implication the entire bench, as a progressive constitutional force.

Describing reform of the House as a matter of ‘the very front rank of constitutional importance’, having been promised in successive King’s Speeches, he decried the government’s lack of progress. He denounced the proposals arising from

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<sup>81</sup> Ibid, 26 Oct. 1921, CAB 27/113/3.

the 1922 committee as ‘almost ... platitudes’, leaving knotty problems unmentioned or simply evaded. His speech had less to say about the Church’s desired future role in parliament, than how it might assist the process of reform. He acknowledged that in a smaller House the number of Lords Spiritual would need to be reduced, but emphasised that the effectiveness of the bishops’ future parliamentary bench would depend on the extent of the Church’s control over its membership.<sup>82</sup>

By 1928, so depoliticised had the issue become that Davidson had the confidence to be more bullish still. The conclusions of the Bryce Conference had, he informed the peers, gone ‘too far’ in reducing the number of bishops in parliament. The Lords Spiritual were, after all, ‘the oldest portion of this House and who for a long period of its history were perhaps the most important part of the House’.<sup>83</sup>

The advent of a measure of self-government for the Church increased the ecclesiastical importance of the House of Lords. Yet the ecclesiastical and political significance of the Lords Spiritual became incidental. Before 1920, intervention in the House had been essential in preserving the Church’s ability to discharge its responsibilities to ‘the nation’; participation in the House of Lords had been regarded as crucial in securing the religious establishment in England and Wales for the good of the whole country. After 1920, it seemed that almost the reverse applied. It was a concern to shield the bishops from the influences and distractions of parliament which ultimately determined their conduct in the House.

The bishops’ role in parliament responded not to political, but to ecclesiastical influences. In fact, the episcopate’s apparent over-exposure to political

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<sup>82</sup> *HL Deb.* 51, cc. 643-53, 20 Jul. 1922.

<sup>83</sup> *HL Deb.* 67, cc. 977-8, 23 Jun. 1927.

matters, and the ill effects which had attended it, had contributed significantly to the campaign for, and realisation of, ecclesiastical self-government. The function of the parliamentary bishops responded to the perception within the Church of the spiritual leadership it was providing – or failing to provide, as the case may be – to churchmen.

The changing nature of debate in the House, and the changing dynamics of the party-political contest, served to deprive the Lords Spiritual of political significance. Moreover, the bishops declined to seek it. In debates on Lords reform, Davidson cast the Church as an essentially constructive, though tangential, influence on the discussions. The ‘Lords Spiritual’ as a concept became a useful sop to the long continuity of parliamentary processes, and little more.

Very rarely did the ecclesiastical issues which dominated the bishops’ parliamentary contributions draw political attention. When they did, the response of churchmen was telling of the extent to which the bishops’ presence in the House of Lords had become ecclesiastically incidental. The essential question was not whether the bishops should reassert their influence in the forums of national politics, but rather whether the surrender of their parliamentary position would free the Church from the meddling of politicians.

This was clear in the wake of the House of Commons’ rejection of the revised Prayer Book in 1927, and again in 1928.<sup>84</sup> The ‘outburst of Erastianism’ from the MPs spurred to defend the Reformation settlement undermined the notion that through the Enabling Act the Church had gained effective autonomy in the

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<sup>84</sup> John Maiden, ‘English evangelicals, protestant national identity, and Anglican Prayer Book revision, 1927-1928’, *Journal of religious history* 34 (2010), esp. p. 434; John Maiden, *National religion and the prayer book controversy, 1927-1928* (Woodbridge, 2009); G.I.T. Machin, ‘Parliament, the Church of England, and the Prayer Book crisis, 1927-8’, *Parliamentary history* 19 (2000), pp. 131-47.

arrangement of its spiritual life.<sup>85</sup> In the ensuing discussions within the Church as to the desirable extent of the state's authority over ecclesiastical matters, it was apparent that few valued the institution of the Lords Spiritual *per se*. This became clear during the sittings of the Archbishops' Commission on the Relations between Church and State, which had been appointed in 1930.<sup>86</sup> During the witness sessions, it became apparent that for many churchmen the place of the parliamentary bishops was only of significance so far as their removal might secure for the Church greater freedom in, for example, the selection of its bishops.<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> See for later instances of parliament's intervention in purely ecclesiastical issues, John Maiden and Peter Webster, 'Parliament, the Church of England and the last gasp of political protestantism, 1963-4', *Parliamentary history* 32 (2013), pp. 361-77.

<sup>86</sup> The Commission had been called to consider the 'legal and constitutional changes, if any' required to 'maintain or secure' the Church's spiritual freedom. It was chaired by Viscount Cecil of Chelwood. *Report of the archbishops' commission on the relations between Church and state*, vol. I (Westminster, 1936), p. 1. For more on the context and the findings of the various Church and state commissions during the twentieth century, see Anthony Dyson, "'Little else but the name": reflections on four Church and state reports', in George Moyser (ed.), *Church and politics today: the role of the Church of England in contemporary politics* (Edinburgh, 1985), pp. 283-312.

<sup>87</sup> See, for example, evidence of Sir Maurice Gwyer, leading lawyer and civil servant. Minutes of witness session, 17 Dec. 1931, BP 128/393.

## 5. Competing visions of the Church establishment in the Lords

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The changing conduct of the Lords Spiritual indicated a significant shift in Church leaders' conception of their responsibilities to the nation. The value of the religious establishment seemed to have become less dependent on the opportunities it afforded for institutional engagement with the state. Yet for a small number of bishops, parliament remained a crucial forum in which they could discharge the responsibilities of their office. There was, in fact, a considerable degree of variance in the importance the bishops afforded to their participation in parliament.

As discussed in an earlier chapter, the Archbishop of Canterbury retained his prominence among the bishops during the inter-war period. There was, in fact, little notable

<b>Parliamentary sessions, 1928/1929 - 1938/1939</b>	
<b>Lord Spiritual</b>	<b>No. contributions</b>
Cosmo Lang	175
Cyril Garbett	69
Bertram Pollock	27
Other bishops	73
<b>Total</b>	344

difference in the level of participation as Davidson gave way to Lang in 1928. Only two further bishops displayed such a consistent interest in the House: Garbett and Pollock. From 1928 to 1939, these three were responsible for nearly eight in every ten of the episcopate's contribution to the House.

A few other bishops, though they did not make numerically significant contributions to debates, gained a reputation as influential parliamentary speakers. Most notable was Hensley Henson of Durham. Henson, as has been commented on, was not able to intervene in parliamentary debates as often as he would have liked; from 1928 to 1939, he contributed to only six debates. Still, he had a gift for rhetoric, and for independent, uncompromising, even wilfully unconventional, thought. He also had a knack for choosing his subjects and the moments of his interventions. His



oratorical prowess, if not his regular attendance in the House, secured for him a place of influence.

In at least one sense, there was continuity in these bishops' understanding of their parliamentary role; they continued to identify closely with a broader social and political elite, at a time when leaders the Church and state were otherwise becoming increasingly distinct.<sup>1</sup> They were all 'House of Lords men', devotees of 'the club'.

For Lang, participation in parliamentary debates fulfilled political ambitions he had nurtured since at least the age of seventeen.<sup>2</sup> Pollock clearly enjoyed rubbing shoulders with 'the great and the good', and was intellectually engaged by the peculiar challenges of interacting with the peers.<sup>3</sup> For Henson, participation in the House, as well as his attendance at the Athenaeum and at Grillions, served as an affirmation of his status in 'Society', a means of salving his career-long sense of being 'an outsider'. He even expressed disappointment that his assumption of the see of Durham exempted him from the responsibility shared by the bishops of lesser sees to begin daily proceedings in the House with prayer. He was as such deprived 'of opportunities of becoming personally acquainted with the Peers'.<sup>4</sup>

Garbett, even more than the others, became culturally integrated into Westminster life, relishing the opportunity to converse with the peers in the chamber

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<sup>1</sup> Kenneth Medhurst and George Moyser, 'From princes to pastors: the changing position of the Anglican episcopate in English society and politics', *West European politics* 2 (1982), pp. 172-91; D.H.J. Morgan, 'The social and educational background of Anglican bishops – continuities and change', *British journal of sociology* 20 (1969), pp. 295-310; Kenneth Thompson, 'Church of England bishops as an elite', in Philip Stanworth and Anthony Giddens (eds.), *Elites and power in British society* (London, 1974), pp. 198-207; Donald A. Smart, 'Who are made diocesan bishops? An inquiry into the appointments during the years 1919-1939', *Theology* 48 (1945), pp. 60-3.

<sup>2</sup> J.G. Lockhart, *Cosmo Gordon Lang* (London, 1949), p. 236.

<sup>3</sup> His published reminiscences focus not on his contributions to debates, but on the personalities of the chamber and the process of delivering effective speeches. Bertram Pollock, *A twentieth century bishop: recollections and reflections* (London, 1944), esp. ch. 3.

<sup>4</sup> Matthew Grimley, 'Henson, Herbert Hensley (1863-1947)', ODNB; Hensley Henson, *Retrospect of an unimportant life*, 3 vols. (London, 1943), II, p. 85.

and tea rooms.<sup>5</sup> He even described his attendance at debates in the House as ‘recreational’, a means of removing himself – mentally as much as physically – from the pressures of diocesan and ecclesiastical work.<sup>6</sup>

The participation of these bishops in parliament was suggestive of much more than a predisposition to elite lifestyles. Their use of the House stemmed largely from an uncertainty about the Church’s role in the nation. Their conduct was the product of competing visions of the Church’s relationship to other Christian communities and churches, and to British and English society, and to the political parties and the state. The House of Lords became a forum in which these bishops sought to adapt to – and indeed, in some cases resist – the emerging settlement.

Lang used his place in the House to give substance to his emerging role as a mediator between Christian communities and the political parties. He sought to emphasise the religious and political value of a national Church which, while being intimately connected to both state and society, expressed no partisan interest in either. Garbett, on the other hand, used the House to project a new role for the Church; religious influence in the legislature was crucial if the spiritually-diminishing effects of contemporary political, social and economic life were to be resisted. Henson’s and Pollock’s conduct was similarly suggestive of a desire to reconnect with the Church’s ‘national’ mission. They used the House to refute the suggestion that with the advance of ecclesiastical self-government, the Church’s responsibilities to the national community had been somehow diminished.

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<sup>5</sup> Garbett memoirs, GP V. Southwark, Coll. 1982/5/A/40.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid, f. 47; Charles Smyth, *Cyril Forster Garbett: Archbishop of York* (London, 1959), p. 433.

## 5.1. Cosmo Lang

Like his predecessor, Davidson, Lang sought a role in the political functioning of the House, claiming to be aloof from vested interests and able to assist the smooth functioning of parliamentary business. However, he had to balance this against his increasingly prominent role as the authentic ‘voice’ of British Christianity. It was a role which invested him with a place of importance in parliament during instances where the political agenda and spiritual imperatives intersected – most notably during the foreign policy crises of the mid-to-late 1930s. However, reconciling the archbishop’s responsibilities – to the effective functioning of the parliamentary system, and the expression of Christian concerns – was not straightforward. Lang’s ineffective adjudication of his responsibilities undermined his authority in the House, and potentially the causes of both the churches and the state.

The Archbishop of Canterbury’s developing role as the *de facto* leader and organisational pivot for the British churches – the various churches in Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland, as well as England – has received some scholarly attention.<sup>7</sup> Free Church leaders had come to value the official recognition of religion that came with establishment, though they continued to desire a greater role in national ceremonial and more frequent consultation with government ministers.<sup>8</sup> They came to view the established privileges of the Church of England as less a source of civic grievance, than as a spiritual opportunity. Through the Archbishop of Canterbury, they could at once gain access to the highest political offices and to the

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<sup>7</sup> Philip Williamson, ‘National days of prayer: the churches, the state and public worship in Britain, 1899-1957’, *English historical review* 128 (2013), pp. 323-66.

<sup>8</sup> *Report of the archbishops’ commission on the relations between Church and state* (London, 1935), II, esp. evidence of Bernard Manning p. 90, Carnegie Simpson p. 189, and M.E. Aubrey p. 245. For a concise summary, see Matthew Grimley, *Citizenship, community and the Church of England: liberal Anglican theories of the state between the wars* (Oxford, 2004), pp. 161-2.

sovereign, while being free of the encumbrances of establishment. Similarly, from at least late 1914, the moderator of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland often made proposals to the Anglican archbishops, prompting them to act on the national platform in conjunction with other Christian leaders.

Churchmen's sense of their place among a greater Christian corpus was also developing. International ecumenical initiatives were expanding rapidly, necessitating the establishment of a new Church Assembly Council to manage relations in September 1933.<sup>9</sup> Through the Council for Foreign Relations, the Church's contact and dialogue with European churches was deepened, while the Archbishop of Canterbury in particular was provided with far more reliable and regular information about developments on the continent.<sup>10</sup>

As the Church drew closer to both its domestic and international counterparts, the archbishop assumed a role as an organisational centre around which collective action might be arranged. Davidson had since at least 1920 assumed some responsibility to coordinate with, and speak in the House on behalf of, the British churches and Christians abroad – notably in protesting against the atrocities perpetrated by the Soviet Union against religious communities and organisations.<sup>11</sup> In the increasingly hostile international context of the 1930s, this facet of the primate's role became more prominent. The emergence of further totalitarian regimes across Europe had led to a spread in religious persecution across the continent unknown for centuries. Such governments – the nominally atheistic Soviet

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<sup>9</sup> Bishops' Meeting, 21-22 Oct. 1932, BM 8/389-90.

<sup>10</sup> Lang to Temple, 1 Sept. 1933, CFR/CFR/1/3.

<sup>11</sup> See, for example, *HL Deb.* 40, cc. 1-3, 29 Apr. 1920.

Union, and later the pagan fascist states – asserted the ultimate supremacy of the state, and refuted Europe’s Christian identity.

In the organisation of the British churches’ response to the religious and political crises of the 1930s, the Archbishop of Canterbury was crucial. Through liaison with him, the interventions of the churches – their calls for prayer and their joint statements – gained a national profile. From 1934, the archbishop’s role even gained an institutional aspect; Lang became the chair of a periodic conference of protestant church leaders, convened when joint statements of the churches’ views on international issues were required.<sup>12</sup>

When the archbishop spoke in the House on international issues, it was increasingly inferred that he did so with the authority of the leaders of British Christianity. He also acted as a conduit through which Christians internationally could communicate with the British state. His position at the juncture between Church and state could be a source of strength in this respect. He could call upon expert inside knowledge, within both the churches and the state. As such, when he spoke in the House of Lords on matters of international Christian concern, he was often aware of ministerial attitudes and could ‘feed’ ministers with proposals likely to be agreeable.

Davidson, for example, had remained in regular contact with Foreign Office and intelligence officials about the religious situation in Russia, passing on information he received through ecclesiastical channels. When he received requests from Russian Orthodox leaders in May 1922 to raise a public protest about the arrest of Patriarch Tikhon, he sought the counsel of government officers as to the sagacity

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<sup>12</sup> Correspondence Dec. 1933-May 1934, LP 54. See also, Williamson, ‘National days of prayer’, pp. 323-66.

of such an intervention, lest it provoke further repression in Russia.<sup>13</sup> The question he placed on the Order Paper in the House of Lords was the product of these discussions, and as Tikhon's imprisonment continued, he continued to receive the advice of government officials.<sup>14</sup>

While the Archbishop of Canterbury gained a new and unique importance from his position between the state and the various British churches, he was also burdened by his responsibilities to both. He felt increasing pressure to express the churches' opinions and to be an advocate for all Christians. However, this had to be balanced against his recognition of political practicalities. The difficulties inherent in this task multiplied during the 1930s, as the deteriorating international situation prompted both political expediency and religious outrage. Indeed, they became apparent within a few years of Lang's translation to Canterbury.

In the first instance, Lang was careful to avoid the suggestion that his position in parliament served political ends; it was a national platform from which the churches could speak to the nation and the government, not one through which they sought to entangle themselves in the party-political conflict. As Christian concerns at persecution in Russia increased during early 1930, Lang, in co-ordination with other English protestant denominations, issued a call for special prayer for those suffering oppression in Russia. It was to be read on 1 March, timed to coincide with special masses called by the pope.<sup>15</sup> Such an intervention had the potential, as Lang was well aware, to be politically provocative. The Labour government had reopened diplomatic relations with the Soviet government in

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<sup>13</sup> Eulogius to Davidson, 15 May 1922, DP 476/84; Archbishop of Kishenev and Hotin to Davidson, 20 May 1922, DP 476/93-5; Davidson to Tyrrell, 15 May 1922, DP 476/87-8.

<sup>14</sup> Davidson to Thring, 19 May 1922, DP 476/89; *HL Deb.* 50, cc. 771-8, 25 May 1922. See also, Leeper to Bell, 19 Mar. 1923, DP 476/157; *HL Deb.* 53, cc. 454-9, 20 Mar. 1923.

<sup>15</sup> *Times*, 1 Mar. 1930.

October 1929 on the agreement that neither interfere with the internal matters of the other. The government had been subjected to sustained criticism from the right-wing press, and had suffered a parliamentary defeat in November 1929 at the hands of Conservative peers on the subject.

Lang was careful to emphasise, both to ministers and those organising the protests, that the questions of religious persecution and the government's diplomatic relations were distinct issues.<sup>16</sup> In the House in February 1930, he drew a line between 'protest in the name of civilisation and religion' and 'more directly political issues'.<sup>17</sup> Such a distinction would not only avoid a potentially bruising conflict between the Church and the government, but was also necessary if the churches' appeal was to be influential. Were the prayers to become associated with any particular party position, it would only undermine their influence in Russia, confirming Bolshevik accusations that foreign powers sought to intervene in and undermine the Soviet state; it would gift the Russian authorities a pretext for further repression.

However, for all Lang's caution, the churches' initiative did indeed get drawn into the party debate. Outrage was provoked in the churches by the government's order that the special prayers should not be said at services for members of the armed services. Lang was forced to speak out. In a debate in the Lords initiated by a Conservative peer, he felt compelled to condemn the government's decision as 'both unfortunate and unnecessary'; they had succeeded in attaching 'a political character to prayers which were never intended to have such an association at all'.<sup>18</sup> It earned him a stiff rebuke from the prime minister, who accused him not only of 'interfering

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<sup>16</sup> Lang to Henderson, 16 Dec. 1929, LP 73/63-4.

<sup>17</sup> *HL Deb.* 76, cc. 575-8, 13 Feb. 1930.

<sup>18</sup> *HL Deb.* 76, cc. 823-30, 6 Mar. 1930.

with the secular policy of the Government, but strengthening those in Russia who are responsible for the persecution'.<sup>19</sup>

Of course, MacDonald's bluster might simply have aimed to deflect attention away from the Cabinet's blunder. Nevertheless, Lang had been caught between his concern not to draw the Church into a political division – and certainly to avoid embarrassing the government – with his growing responsibility to speak for Christians persecuted abroad. His efforts to publicise the plight of Russian Christians had drawn the Church into a party conflict, and potentially undermined the original intention of the appeal.<sup>20</sup>

At other times, it was clear that Lang prioritised his supposed duty to support initiatives by the government which seemed to be in the national interest, particularly when Christian indignation had not been readily provoked. This was certainly apparent in his involvement on the Joint Select Committee on Indian Constitutional Reform, appointed in 1933. Indeed, even Lang's appointment to the committee was a political calculation. His participation gave the committee a veneer of independence, shielding it, at least in part, from the accusation that it was a 'puppet show', established to 'rubber stamp' the government's preferred policy.<sup>21</sup>

It was also apparent that Lang's involvement might help to head off the 'die hard' Conservative opponents of the government's plans, like Sir Henry Page Croft MP. Such critics were not only staunch Christians, but peddled an imperial jingoism with a particular theological slant. They supposed the institutions of colonial government – including the Church – were engaged in a Miltonic struggle between

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<sup>19</sup> MacDonald to Lang, 7 Mar. 1930, LP 73/225-9.

<sup>20</sup> See, for the broader context of Christian protests against Russian persecution, Giles Udy, 'The Christian protest movement, the Labour government and Soviet religious repression, 1929-1931', *Journal of ecclesiastical history* 66 (2015), pp. 116-39.

<sup>21</sup> Hoare to Lang, 9 Mar. 1933, LP 42/166-7.



the divinely-ordained order and the human tendency to descend into chaos. The British nation had a peculiar historical responsibility, bound to its Christian identity, to promote – even enforce – peace and justice in the world. Some advocates of the Christian imperialist discourse were so swept up in the notion of Providence, that they drew literal comparisons between the biblical story of the Israelites and the imperial expansion of the British state.<sup>22</sup>

The rebels, led by Croft and Winston Churchill, succeeded in raising a national campaign and attracting 70 MPs to their cause. Their activity had caused the Secretary of State for India, Samuel Hoare, much anxiety. In appointing the Archbishop of Canterbury to the committee, Hoare sought to head off his opponents. ‘British Christianity’, as made manifest by the archbishop, had been implicitly enlisted to the committee’s proposals; an answer had been provided to those who might claim that the nation had abandoned its divine purpose. So significant was Lang in this respect, that Hoare even considered offering him the chairmanship of the committee, though Lang suggested the time required to oversee the production of its report precluded him from such a role.<sup>23</sup>

Hoare’s appointment of Lang was a political calculation predicated on the archbishop’s perceived political disinterest, and his recognised capacity to speak authoritatively for ‘Christianity’. Yet it is not apparent from the surviving committee minutes that Lang was fully aware of such expectations. He did make an initial attempt to collate the views of Indian Christians by writing to the Metropolitan of India in March 1933.<sup>24</sup> However, the correspondence was not followed up. Lang seems not to have been especially concerned to safeguard the interests of Indian

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<sup>22</sup> Gerald Studdert-Kennedy, *British Christians, Indian nationalists and the Raj* (Delhi, 1991), ch. 7.

<sup>23</sup> Memo., undated (Mar. 1933), LP 42/168.

<sup>24</sup> Lang to Metropolitan of India, 31 Mar. 1933, LP 42/174.

Christians – and thereby preserve at least a semblance of the Christian character of Indian governance – or even to represent religious interests in general.

S.K. Datta, one of the two representatives of Indian Christianity who had sat on the second Indian Round Table Conference in 1931, contacted Lang to emphasise the 1933 committee's 'grave omission' in not requesting any Christian witnesses.<sup>25</sup> Lang's concern was not to act on Datta's plea, but to support the government in the process it had laid out. He referred the letter to Hoare for advice, tellingly confiding that he 'had not noticed ... that there was no special representative of Indian Christians'.<sup>26</sup> Hoare was unmoved, and Lang followed suit. He suggested to Datta that there had been 'grave difficulty' in finding representatives for Indian Christians, but recommended that Datta's organisation should consider submitting a memorandum.<sup>27</sup>

Lang's concern had been to ensure the smooth functioning of the committee, leavening the political divisions and enabling the government to pursue the constitutional process it had set out.<sup>28</sup> It was an ideal role for a non-partisan statesman, the kind of role Davidson might have sought in the early years of century. However, it was not that which was expected of him by Christian communities, the Conservative opponents of reform, and indeed the government itself.

Only after the committee sessions had ended did Lang realise his error. Croft published a letter to the archbishop emphasising the 'very grave anxieties' felt by churchmen at the committee's proposed reforms. He equated the preservation of Christian influence in India with the maintenance of law and order. The failure to

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<sup>25</sup> Datta to Lang, 22 Apr. 1933, LP 42/177-82.

<sup>26</sup> Lang to Hoare, 3 May 1933, LP 42/140.

<sup>27</sup> Hoare to Lang, 5 May 1933, LP 42/192; Lang to Hoare, 10 May 1933, LP 42/193-4.

<sup>28</sup> See, for example, Hoare MSS Eur. E240/49; Studdert-Kennedy, *British Christians*, p. 210.

safeguard the position of Indian Christians in the subcontinent's future administration would, he suggested, lead to persecution akin to that in Russia, and the resurfacing of violence between Hindus and Muslims. Above all,

we are concerned with what appears to be a spiritual abdication ... that for sentiment or through fear we are sacrificing the greatest duties imposed upon Christians, by removing perhaps for all time the witness of the Cross from India.<sup>29</sup>

Lang was blindsided by what he described as this 'very violent' intervention. Belatedly, he recognised that 'a great outcry about the betrayal of the interests of Indian Christianity' was to be raised.<sup>30</sup> He had conceived of his role on the committee as preparing the way for the government's constitutional process; it was apparent now that this risked being undermined by his negligence in representing Christian interests. In rather frantic correspondence with the Metropolitan of India, Lang acknowledged that he was entirely unprepared to meet the expectations of his critics. '[T]hrough lack of evidence' – the collection of which, it is worth repeating, he had not seen fit to pursue – 'hardly any mention' had been made of Indian Christians during the committee sessions. He now desperately sought such evidence from the Metropolitan, so that he could 'satisfy a wider public that I have done all I could to ascertain so far as possible the opinions of Indian Christians'.<sup>31</sup> Lang made his request to the Metropolitan less than a week before the committee's draft report was to be presented, and only a few months before discussions were scheduled to be concluded. In subsequent letters to other Christian leaders on the subcontinent, Lang

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<sup>29</sup> *Times*, 30 Apr. 1934. See also, *Church Times*, 1 May 1934; *Yorkshire Post*, 14 May 1934; Studdert-Kennedy, *British Christians*, pp. 204-5.

<sup>30</sup> Lang to bishops of South India and Lahore, 30 Apr. 1934, LP 42/234-5.

<sup>31</sup> Lang to Metropolitan of India, 28 Apr. 1934, LP 42/232-3.

rather ignobly excused his sudden haste in compiling evidence on the Metropolitan's failure to have prepared evidence in advance.<sup>32</sup>

During the House of Lords debates on the committee's report and the ensuing bill, Lang did his duty by the government, claiming that the concerns of Indian Christians had been well addressed. He acknowledged his peculiar responsibility to them, and claimed to have been 'in constant communication' with the Metropolitan of India and other Christian leaders. The result of what he described as his *exhaustive* investigations had been that he could find 'no corroboration' for Indian Christians to fear for their future in India.<sup>33</sup>

He continued to receive written representations from Christian leaders in India, with one asking him to intervene in the bill's committee stage 'to improve our lot' – that is to say, the representation of Indian Christians in the future legislature and public services.<sup>34</sup> Still, it was clear throughout the proceedings that Lang's concern to support the government took precedence. He even took a step towards orchestrating the bishops' bench after Hoare suggested that it was 'very important' for the Lords Spiritual to vote on the resolution in favour of the committee's report.<sup>35</sup> Though the circular Lang subsequently sent to the parliamentary bishops has not survived, Henson remarked of the episode that '[i]t can hardly be maintained that the bishops take no part in politics, if the Primate acts as a Government whip'.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Lang to bishops of South India and Lahore, 30 Apr. 1934, LP 42/234-5.

<sup>33</sup> *HL Deb.* 95, cc. 309-21, 13 Dec. 1934.

<sup>34</sup> Lang arranged to meet with Hoare to discuss these demands, but confessed to being 'somewhat annoyed' that the claims had not been brought before the committee. DeSouza to Lang, 21 Feb. 1935, LP 42/340-2.

<sup>35</sup> Hoare to Lang, 10 Dec. 1934, IOR/L/PO/6/94/ii/351.

<sup>36</sup> Henson, *Retrospect*, II, p. 358. No copy of Lang's circular to the Lords Spiritual survives in the collection of his papers in Lambeth Palace Library.

How frequently the archbishop acted in such a fashion is difficult to determine – such arrangements probably resulted most often from private discussion between the bishops on the side-lines of ecclesiastical gatherings and at the periodic Bishops' Meetings at Lambeth. Almost certainly, the practice became less common in the inter-war period, particularly after Welsh disestablishment in 1920. Nevertheless, in this instance, Lang's perceived responsibility for the effective conduct of parliamentary business clearly extended to the exertion of his influence on the bishops' bench.

In adjudicating between his religious and political responsibilities, the comparatively leisurely pace at which the 1935 India Bill progressed had at least given Lang time to consider and adjust to expectations. It had enabled him to put forward a case that, in fact, the agenda of Christian communities and the government were aligned. Lang's mediation of his roles in the House became increasingly fraught when circumstances denied him the opportunity for such reflection. In such cases, the ineffective handling of his responsibilities denied him an effective role either in advocating the Christian case or in supporting the parliamentary process. Whatever political significance the circumstances invested him with was squandered.

This became apparent as the crises on the European continent unfolded during the 1930s. The moral case for principled intervention against acts of international aggression was clear. At the end of the Great War, the British churches had swung enthusiastically behind the principles of collective security and the League of Nations.<sup>37</sup> Davidson and Lang had both made numerous statements and

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<sup>37</sup> E.R. Norman, *Church and society in England 1770-1970: a historical study* (Oxford, 1976), p. 298. Andrew Chandler, 'The judgement of an archbishop: Cosmo Gordon Lang and British foreign policy, 1928-1939', in Keith Robbins and John Fisher (eds.), *Religion and diplomacy: religion and British foreign policy, 1815 to 1941* (Dordrecht, 2010), p. 197. See also CP Add. MS 51154 A, *passim*.

calls for prayer in support of the League through the 1920s and 1930s.<sup>38</sup> When the Italian invasion of Abyssinia began in October 1935, there can have been little doubt about the position of the churches, or indeed that of the archbishop, on the issue. In its use of war as an instrument of policy, Italy had disregarded and broken the League's Covenant. As such, Italy's quarrel, Lang argued, was not with Abyssinia alone, but with all the members of the League.

Having corresponded and met with the leaders of other churches during this crisis, Lang used his position in the House of Lords to defend the use of force to uphold the law. Peace attained through yielding to aggression and lawlessness could not last: 'the pursuit of mere peace for its own sake defeats its own end, for the peace obtained by such acquiescence is certainly one which could never stand'. In all this, referring to his discussions with other church leaders, he claimed to 'have behind me a great multitude of the Christian citizens of this country'.<sup>39</sup> It was the most impressive speech of his parliamentary career. However, by bringing the force of the Christian community to bear on the issue in the House, he had exposed himself to the criticism of those in public life seeking to appease the Italian government.<sup>40</sup> The king, George V, relayed a message through Lang's chaplain sternly requesting the archbishop 'to keep off Abyssinia' and 'confine himself to his proper sphere'.<sup>41</sup>

Yet by the time the House came to consider the Munich Settlement three years later in October 1938 – 'peace for our time' – Lang had abandoned his commitment to the League and its processes. 'I cannot refrain from adding on my

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<sup>38</sup> As early as January 1919, the leaders of churches across the British Isles had signed a statement appealing for the creation of 'a League of Nations as an essentially Christian means of attaining international justice and peace'. *Times*, 14 Jan. 1919.

<sup>39</sup> *HL Deb.* 97, cc. 1222-9, 24 Oct. 1935.

<sup>40</sup> See, for example, Consuelo Vanderbilt to Winston Churchill, 12 Oct. 1935, CHAR 2/237/111.

<sup>41</sup> Diary of A.C. Don, 15 Dec. 1935, MS 2863/104-5.

own behalf and on behalf of the other Spiritual Peers', he began, 'our thankfulness to Almighty God for the deliverance which had been brought'. '[N]o praise' could be too great for Neville Chamberlain's achievements or his personal qualities, nor those of his Foreign Secretary Lord Halifax. The attainment of peace, seemingly at any cost, was forefront in his argument; the injustice of catastrophic war outweighed the injustices which might have been done to the Czechoslovak government or people. 'It would have seemed incredible' had the calamity of war spread across Europe 'merely because of the troubles of three million people in a small district in the centre of Europe'.<sup>42</sup> Lang echoed Chamberlain's words, delivered in an earlier broadcast, which questioned why Britain should be prepared to go to war 'because of a quarrel in a far away country between people of whom we know nothing'.<sup>43</sup>

Lang was, of course, far from alone in his change of stance. With the Abyssinian crisis, the occupation of the Rhineland, and indeed Chamberlain's own public declaration in 1936 that the League had failed, the consensus in British politics and within the churches in support of the League had collapsed. With the notable exception of Henson, most of the bishops had turned against the League as an effective means to preserve international peace. Bell of Chichester, who associated closely with anti-Nazi elements inside Germany, wrote to *The Times* in September suggesting that '[e]ven a defeat in negotiation now, if we should be defeated, however humiliating, would be better than a war'.<sup>44</sup> Garbett argued that it would be undemocratic to sacrifice so many lives to uphold the injustices of Versailles. He maintained through to the war's conclusion that the bishops' support

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<sup>42</sup> *HL Deb.* 110, cc. 1318-24, 3 Oct. 1938.

<sup>43</sup> *Times*, 28 Sept. 1938.

<sup>44</sup> *Times*, 27 Sept. 1938; Andrew Chandler, 'Munich and morality: the bishops of the Church of England and appeasement', *Twentieth-century British history* 5 (1994), pp. 84-8.

of the Munich agreement had been justified.<sup>45</sup> In the House of Lords, although Lang expressed his hope that the League's authority might one day be revived 'as still the only permanent instrument for preserving international order, justice, and peace', he concluded that 'we must look at things in their true proportion'.<sup>46</sup>

Lang's reversal on appeasement – prevaricating over his support for collective security and his repudiation of the use of war as an instrument of policy – was in part the result of disillusionment with the League, and in part suggestive of his pragmatic commitment to the cause of peace.<sup>47</sup> '[W]arm wishes', Lang suggested to Robert Cecil, leader of the League of Nations Union and his close friend, on being asked to sign a letter in support of the League in 1935, 'must be tempered by cool judgment'.<sup>48</sup>

However, Lang was also seeking to reconcile the competing religious and political pressures acting on him. Appeasement, it seemed, offered a means of rallying the religious beliefs of the churches behind the government's pragmatic agenda. His intervention over Abyssinia in 1935 had been strong, but he was clear that the Christian moral concern was not necessarily entirely out of step with government policy. He had expressed this in a speech at the opening of the Church Congress in Bournemouth, the day after the League had announced Italy as the aggressor in the Abyssinian conflict. Lang believed that he had the support of those assembled in stating 'that we stand by our Government in its refusal to acquiesce in this assault' upon the League, and 'in its determination to join with other members of

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<sup>45</sup> Chandler, 'Munich and morality', p. 86; Garbett memoirs, GP VI. Winchester, Coll. 1982/5/A/58-62.

<sup>46</sup> *HL Deb.* 110, cc. 1297-366, 3 Oct. 1938.

<sup>47</sup> Chandler, 'Munich and morality', pp. 77-99; Chandler, 'Judgement of an archbishop', pp. 205-8.

<sup>48</sup> Lang to Cecil, 30 Nov. 1935, CP Add. MS 51154 A/66. See also *HL Deb.* 107, cc. 718-22, 16 Feb. 1938.



the League of Nations in defending and upholding the Covenant of the League'.<sup>49</sup>

Lang perceived an alignment of Christian moral imperative and government policy, and, though Christian opinion may have moved ahead of political opinion, he intervened in the House to bring them further into line. His *volte face* over appeasement can be similarly understood; he had found himself uniquely placed to more perfectly align Christian opinion with the government's actions.

Support for the Munich settlement, both religious and secular, began to collapse within weeks, as news broke of the *Kristallnacht* pogroms within Germany. Lang found himself politically and morally exposed. In his efforts to recover the principled high ground he had abandoned, his ensuing actions actually served to diminish what little influence the British churches had abroad. In the wake of the Nazi invasion of Czechoslovakia in March 1939, Lang reversed course in a speech to the House of Lords. So desperate was he to recover moral authority that he was driven to extremes of hyperbole in the House. He suggested the marshalling of Christian forces and the massing of powers 'for the defence of liberty', unwisely including the Soviet Union in his call. At the peak of his oratory, he announced he would renew his call to Christian communities throughout Europe and perhaps America.<sup>50</sup> He had not even begun to canvas support for such a move, and nor was the crucial support of the papacy likely to be forthcoming.<sup>51</sup> Caution had been thrown aside, he noted to the Roman Catholic Cardinal Hinsley, in response to the 'pressure from many quarters about some kind of effort to give Christendom a voice

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<sup>49</sup> Lang speech notes, 8 Oct. 1935, LP 54/313-24.

<sup>50</sup> *HL Deb.* 112, cc. 319-24. 20 Mar. 1939.

<sup>51</sup> A statement was eventually published on 17 May 1939. It was signed by various church leaders in the UK and across Europe, though it lacked the support of the papacy and German churches. Lang, in fact, had to issue a separate statement to explain why support had been so limited. His appeal was, as Andrew Chandler has noted, a 'damp squib'; hardly the decisive intervention his speech had seemed to promise. Chandler, 'Judgement of an archbishop', pp. 216-19.

at the present time'.<sup>52</sup> His intervention had been rash and ill-considered. His invocation of the atheistic Soviet Union in particular shook many Christians.<sup>53</sup>

The swings in his position, and the apparent incoherence of his moral position, had the effect of seeming to confirm the accusations already circulating in the German and Italian press that he was little more than an adjunct to the British government. One German newspaper thought it showed 'how little Archbishop Lang understands the spirit of the Reformation which separates politics from religion'.<sup>54</sup> What little positive influence the British churches might have been able to exert over events in Axis countries through the Archbishop of Canterbury – though this was, in any case, only limited – had been expended.<sup>55</sup>

Lang continued to liaise closely with other British churches in the organisation of joint statements, though he was more hesitant in his direct political interventions. The dust of his intervention refusing to settle, he chose to remove himself from the political fray, finally taking long-standing medical advice that he depart for a period of rest. The Archbishop's situation between the British churches and the state had invested him with particular political and spiritual importance during the crises of the 1930s. Yet it is clear that he lacked clarity as to the balance of his responsibilities – to the nation and the state, the Church and the churches – at any one time.

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<sup>52</sup> Lang to Hinsley, 22 Mar. 1939, LP 56/66. See also Lang to Berry, 31 Mar. 1939, LP 56/102.

<sup>53</sup> Chandler, 'Judgement of an archbishop', pp. 215-6.

<sup>54</sup> Translation from German of General Newspaper report, 22 Mar. 1939, LP 56/86. See also article by Bishop Heckel in *Deutsch-Evangelische Korrespondenz* (Ger.), Keller to Lang, 31 Mar. 1939, LP 56/106.

<sup>55</sup> See also, Don memo., 5 May 1939, LP 56/236-7.

## 5.2. Cyril Garbett

Garbett's interest in the House in matters of social conditions and welfare has been noted elsewhere in this thesis. He alone accounted for more than seven in every ten episcopal contributions to debates on housing conditions, slums, and planning policy during the 1930s. Such contributions were suggestive of his perception of the Church's – and indeed, Christianity's – declining place in British society. For Garbett, the House of Lords provided a means of asserting the indispensable nature of religious influences within the nation's social life, and to provide a lead to other churchmen and laymen in recovering the Church's relevance in society.

Garbett had experienced first-hand the apathy of the working classes and their reluctance to engage with religious instruction as a curate in Portsea and as Bishop of Southwark. Despite the intensive effort of various Christian denominations to rouse the people in these localities, their efforts produced little success of note.<sup>56</sup> The national community seemed not only to be losing its grounding in Christian teaching, but had become apathetic about it. Nearing the end of his career in 1955, Garbett reflected on fifty-five years of ministry and identified 'the decline in public worship, [and] growth of indifference to Christian faith and its moral standards' as 'the most significant change' he had witnessed.<sup>57</sup>

What was significant about Garbett's eventual involvement in the House was not that he had identified Christianity's lack of working-class appeal, but that he linked social deprivation with spiritual degradation. The suggestion that poor social conditions reduced a person's receptiveness to the Christian message caused Garbett much consternation and informed much of his work in the House. In his influential

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<sup>56</sup> Garbett memoirs, GP V. Southwark, Coll. 1982/5/A/8.

<sup>57</sup> 'Retrospect', undated (1955), GP Coll. 1982/5/A/1-2.

volume on the social conditions in South London, he recorded in detail how the population, children in particular, had been exposed to ‘grave moral dangers’. ‘Everything is against the spiritual development of the majority of children’ where religious instruction and role models were sparse, and where overcrowding and desperation exposed children to sinful behaviours.<sup>58</sup> The Church needed to make known ‘the character and love of God revealed in Jesus Christ’ to those in the slums, so consumed by the struggle against their conditions that they could not acknowledge divinity: ‘The foulness of every slum denies that God is love’.<sup>59</sup> Spiritual work had a social importance, and social work had a spiritual importance, for ‘it is fruitless to build better houses unless there are men and women who know who to make the best use of them’.<sup>60</sup> Garbett’s ideas were encapsulated in his 1950 volume on the relationship – desired and actual – between Church and state.

Body and soul are so closely connected that it is futile to attempt to deal with one and to ignore the other. Environment, which the State can change or modify, may have a profound influence on man’s life and character for good or for evil. The Church must not be indifferent.<sup>61</sup>

The expansion of the state into areas of social provision which the Church had formerly managed posed a potentially grave threat to the nation’s spiritual welfare.<sup>62</sup> This shift in authority was not *per se* a bad thing. He recognised that there had been a ‘quickening in collective conscience’ against social injustice, and clearly the resources of the state outstripped those of the Church.<sup>63</sup> However, the intervention of the state in the provision of welfare without the leavening of spiritual

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<sup>58</sup> Garbett, *Heart of South London* (London, 1931), esp. pp. 1-25.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid, p. 132.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid, p. 135-8.

<sup>61</sup> Cyril Garbett, *Church and state in England* (London, 1950), p. 295.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid, pp. 101-2.

<sup>63</sup> Cyril Garbett, *A call to Christians: the presidential address given by the Bishop of Winchester at the Church Congress at Bournemouth on October 8th 1935* (London, 1935), p. 32; ‘Retrospect’, undated (1955), GP Coll. 1982/5/A/1-2.

insight would, he thought, be disastrous. The nation's spiritual regeneration required not only social issues to be tackled, but for them to be approached with a mindfulness of such spiritual insights. The sprawling bureaucracy of the state on its own could not be expected to recognise this. 'In the anxiety to plan,' Garbett wrote in 1950, 'the planner often forgets to ask what is the end and purpose of planning'.<sup>64</sup> Christian influence was required, lest the state be allowed to 'forget that the main purpose of its existence is to protect and facilitate the development and expression of personality'.<sup>65</sup>

To Garbett's mind, there were clear resonances between the political philosophies which underpinned the expansion of the British state, and the attitudes towards individuals which underpinned totalitarian forms of government. A form of government had arisen which, in its claims of the immutable authority of the state and in its subjugation of the individual, was diametrically opposed to Christian teaching. 'It is only in a world that is largely pagan', Garbett declared to the Church Congress in 1935, 'that the Totalitarian State is possible'.<sup>66</sup> Lang and most of the other bishops would likely have agreed, though Garbett was unusually eloquent and persistent in his statements. It was imperative for the future of Christian civilization that the influence of the Church be fully exerted on matters of social welfare, to impart a sense that the needs of the state were not all-consuming, to ensure that the inherent value of the individual was acknowledged, and their rights protected.

For Garbett, his participation in the House of Lords was crucial in discharging this responsibility. In the first place, through it he could induce churchmen to activity. 'It is in the parishes', Garbett commented in 1935, 'that the

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<sup>64</sup> Garbett, *Church and state*, p. 299.

<sup>65</sup> Garbett, *Call to Christians*, pp. 32-3.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 22-8.

battle for the kingdom of God will be fought and won'.<sup>67</sup> The national platform of the House – as opposed to the ecclesiastical platform of the Assembly, which he largely eschewed – enabled him to speak to all Christians, regardless of the depth of devotion or the frequency of their worship.

Certainly, Church campaigners understood that the Lords Spiritual, and Garbett in particular, filled such a role. Before a debate that Garbett was to introduce in February 1930 on housing conditions, the chairman of the Chelsea Housing Association pressed upon Lang's chaplain the benefits that might accrue if the archbishop or Garbett were to note in the House 'that their attention had been drawn' to the actions of certain churchmen in improving poor quality housing in their areas. If they approved and commended these efforts, they 'could and would be widely followed'.<sup>68</sup>

On occasion, Garbett even seemed to be speaking on behalf of the welfare organisations which he referred to in debates, relaying their policy recommendations and – though mostly only inferentially – endorsing them. What he was doing was citing best practice and giving the peers the benefit of external insight; what he was avowedly not doing was advocating specific policy change. Speaking before the Church Congress in 1935, he disclaimed any such role for the Church in formulating schemes of economic or social change; it was beyond their 'special qualifications'. Rather, churchmen had a crucial role in setting forth 'the Vision of God', to 'arouse the national conscience' and 'declare the Christian principles which must be applied in removing them'.<sup>69</sup> He wrote similarly in 1950 that the Church was not required to prepare schemes to address social problems, but rather to 'proclaim the Christian

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<sup>67</sup> Ibid, p. 67.

<sup>68</sup> Currie to Haigh, 22 Feb. 1930, LP 40/32-43.

<sup>69</sup> Garbett, *Call to Christians*, pp. 79-81.

standards by which all public policy should be judged and condemn actions and conditions contrary to them'.<sup>70</sup>

Garbett's chief purpose in the House was, then, to provide what he termed 'social witness', bringing to bear the benefit of Christian insight to the politicians' proposed solutions to social problems. In the first place, this meant ensuring that policy was coherent and comprehensive, and in the second, that the government was being held to its own standard. He often introduced motions requesting reports on the progress of government schemes, providing the peers, charitable organisations, and the public with the means to determine the government's resolve. When housebuilding appeared to slow down, he went to the House, armed with reports and statistics, to seek clarification on the steps the government was taking to ensure that its targets were met. He could be critical of government action, and often emphasised areas in which it was lacking, as in the failure to address the persistence of poor quality basement dwellings.<sup>71</sup>

This was a role to which the Lords Spiritual were uniquely suited: able to raise criticisms of the government's performance without necessarily drawing the debate on social issues into the realm of the party-political division. It was an important aspect of the role that Garbett envisioned. The lack of long-term policy coherence and stability had undermined the efforts of the 1920s to redress the housing problem, sapping the confidence of private investors and causing confusion. Through his interventions, Garbett sought to encourage a consistent approach to the problems at hand, rather than one which shifted with the election cycle.<sup>72</sup> At one point, for example, he proposed the formation of a 'Central Council', a temporary

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<sup>70</sup> Garbett, *Church and state*, pp. 131-2.

<sup>71</sup> *HL Deb.* 81, cc. 777-85, 13 Jul. 1931; *HL Deb.* 86, cc. 50-7, 24 Nov. 1932.

<sup>72</sup> See, for example, *HL Deb.* 53, cc. 891-3, 25 Apr. 1923.

board of experts who might co-ordinate efforts to address housing conditions across the country.<sup>73</sup>

He continued to encourage government to think beyond the horizon of the next general election throughout the 1930s. In 1933, he offered his support to the establishment of a ‘National Housing Corporation’, essentially a quasi-autonomous non-governmental organisation, which would have access to government resources to improve and expand the housing stock, but would be able to pursue its work independently of electoral cycle.<sup>74</sup> ‘[U]ntil some clear and definite statement is made by the Ministry of Health’, he had earlier warned the peers, ‘I think we shall find that there is a pause in the building of houses’.<sup>75</sup>

Despite his prominence, historians have generally come to a low estimation of Garbett. He applied himself thoughtfully to the relationship between Church and state, and was a consummate social campaigner, but was ultimately intellectually unoriginal and rather unremarkable.<sup>76</sup> However, the interest in Garbett’s work lies not in his admittedly less than radical views, but rather in his active application of them. In an increasingly religiously non-observant – perhaps even secular – society, Garbett believed a national Church had the responsibility ‘of arousing and educating the conscience of the State and the nation on matters of public policy and administration’.<sup>77</sup> It was this that he pursued – almost uniquely among his contemporaries on the bishops’ bench – through parliament.

Throughout his career, as his later publications brought to the fore, he grappled with the issue of establishment. It was clear that he had a definite and

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<sup>73</sup> *HL Deb.* 81, c. 785, 13 Jul. 1931.

<sup>74</sup> Garbett to Lang, 29 Nov. 1933, LP 40/195.

<sup>75</sup> *HL Deb.* 86, c. 55, 24 Nov. 1932.

<sup>76</sup> Norman, *Church and society*, pp. 146, 204.

<sup>77</sup> Garbett, *Church and state*, pp. 131-2.



coherent conception of the nature of the nation's spiritual needs, and acted upon it accordingly. He attained a place in the House which was highly valued by both government and ecclesiastic authorities. Unusually – probably uniquely for a mid twentieth-century bishop – his continued participation in the House of Lords was a factor in his prospects for career advancement. Lang, in considering Garbett's future within the Church during the 1930s, informed MacDonald that it was important that he should end up within easy reach of London, 'where his influence in the counsels of the Church and the position he has acquired in the House of Lords are important'.<sup>78</sup>

### 5.3. Hensley Henson and Bertram Pollock

Garbett had feared that, as the state expanded into new areas of social provision, the Church would retreat from its role in the nation's social life. Henson and Pollock were similarly concerned that the Church risked abandoning its national role. For them, however, it was not the expanding state, but rather the advent of ecclesiastical self-government which posed a threat.

The Assembly, they reasoned, was apt to be captured by doctrinal extremists who would discard the Church's responsibility to minister to the whole nation and turn it into a mere denomination. Henson and Pollock used the House of Lords as a means of repudiating what they considered to be the pretensions of ecclesiastical self-government, the sentiments it was engendering, and the reform proposals which

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<sup>78</sup> MacDonald offered Garbett the see of Rochester in 1930, believing it would be less strenuous than Southwark and thereby grant him 'rather more free time for work in other places, not least the House of Lords'. Garbett eventually accepted the see of Winchester, believing it to be a 'stepping stone' to the see of London. MacDonald to Garbett, 2 Jul. 1930, GP Coll. 1982/5/A/'Southwark'; Lang to Garbett, 21 Mar. 1932, GP Coll. 1982/5/A/'The offer of Winchester'; Bernard Palmer, *High and mitred: a study of prime ministers as bishop-makers 1837-1977* (London, 1992), pp. 200-2.

were resulting. By the very act of mounting their opposition in the legislature, they were affirming the sovereignty of parliament and, thereby, the Church's responsibility to 'the nation' and its representatives.

Henson's and Pollock's opposition to the direction of ecclesiastical change was well known within the Church. In their view, parliamentary authority over the Church had, for all its faults, ensured that in their interpretation of doctrine and formulation of ritual, Church leaders were accountable to the nation they served. The advance of ecclesiastical self-government now threatened to overturn the Reformation settlement and transform the Church into a sect. The root of Henson's and Pollock's concern lay in the limiting of the Assembly's franchise to those who both had been baptised, and who had declared that they were not members of another denomination. For them, the narrowly defined ecclesiastical franchise was a betrayal of Reformation ideals and the idea of a 'national' Church. Pollock lamented that the Assembly had 'drawn a line' around and divided Englishmen.<sup>79</sup> Henson warned readers of *The Times* that by devising sectarian tests for the Church franchise, 'the people of England will be divided by statute into two categories'; those within the Church, and those without. In undermining, so they believed, the notion that the established Church was responsible for and accountable to the whole nation, 'an ideal which has appealed to religious Englishmen for nearly four centuries will have definitely passed away'. In passing the Enabling Act, parliament had unwittingly

exchanged the status which was in principle Christian for one which is in principle sectarian, and they have banished from the realm of practical possibilities the ideal of a National Church.<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> For debates on the Assembly franchise, see Norman, *Church and society*, pp. 273-5; Kenneth Thompson, *Bureaucracy and church reform: the organizational response of the Church of England to social change 1800-1965* (Oxford, 1970), esp. pp. 172-3.

<sup>80</sup> *Times*, 15 Dec. 1919. See also Henson, *Retrospect*, II, pp. 305-6.

The establishment was not only undermined in concept; a limited franchise risked the capture of the institutions of ecclesiastical self-government by organised sectarians. A body so narrowly conceived, Pollock thought, could make changes to Church life which served marginal interests, disregarding national sentiments and excluding the ‘silent body of pious worshipers’.<sup>81</sup> The threat came from the Anglo-Catholics, whose rituals, he supposed, commended themselves only to particular individuals and not to English congregations or parishioners in general. In his memoir, he wistfully recalled the days when Wesley and others had promoted ‘the personal devotion of individual upright and saintly lives’.<sup>82</sup>

Henson shared Pollock’s fears of the Anglo-Catholic agenda. In the agitation of the Life and Liberty group, which had helped to prepare the ground for the Enabling Act, Henson inferred a desire to

organize the Church of England on “Catholic” lines *before* the crisis of Disestablishment in order to make sure that *after* the crisis that organization, being actually in possession, would be maintained.<sup>83</sup>

His suspicions of the ‘sacerdotalist party’ were confirmed by the insistence of a number of Anglo-Catholics, including Gore, on an even narrower ecclesiastical franchise based on Confirmation, rather than compromise on the baptismal franchise. However, Henson was hardly the evangelical Pollock was – far from it. He opposed all forms of sectarianism and fanaticism, whether Anglo-Catholic or evangelical.<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> *Times*, 15 Sept. 1922.

<sup>82</sup> Pollock, *Twentieth century bishop*, pp. 123-4.

<sup>83</sup> Henson, *Retrospect*, I, p. 209. There was an interesting intersection between Henson’s vehement opposition to socialism, and his suspicion of the motives of Anglo-Catholics; many in the Christian Socialist movement also professed to be Anglo-Catholic.

<sup>84</sup> See also Hensley Henson, ‘The Anglican version of Christianity’, *The Church of England: its nature and its future, lectures delivered in King’s College, London, during the autumn of 1918* (London, 1919), pp. 51-113. Pollock’s evangelical sectarianism, and Henson’s disdain of sectarianism in all its forms, came to a head in their well-known conflict over the Prayer Book: Henson, *Retrospect*, II, pp. 170-1.

He identified the representative voice of the laity not in any narrowly-conceived ecclesiastical collective, but in parliament. In this context, it did not matter to him that a great many of its members were unattached to the Church of England, or even if they professed no religion at all; parliament was representative of the whole of England, and thus it was *right* that it should continue to govern that nation's Church.<sup>85</sup>

It was not long before Henson's and Pollock's fears that the Church Assembly might be used to undermine the Church's national character were confirmed. 'Hardly had the new "Church Assembly" ... begun operations', Henson wrote, 'before the business of breaking up the ancient dioceses was taken in hand'.<sup>86</sup> In the attempt to reduce the bishops' geographical oversight, Henson inferred an agenda to turn the episcopate into mere 'denominational officers'. The expectation would grow that bishops of 'petty dioceses' should be intimately involved in the administration of local church life, closely supervising the work of their clergy and deeply connected to lay life. Bishops would no longer believe that they had a role in the leadership of the national community.

To Henson, 'the partisans of small Bishoprics' were essentially centralisers, seeking to diminish the independence of the bishops in order that they might better be able to use the Assembly to impose their own doctrinal preferences on an unsuspecting Church. Hugh Cecil, he declared, 'wants to have the Church of England governed, no doubt in the light of his wisdom, from the centre'.<sup>87</sup> For Pollock, the notion of small bishoprics lay outside of 'English custom' – by which,

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<sup>85</sup> Owen Chadwick, *Hensley Henson: a study in the friction between Church and state* (Oxford, 1983), pp. 182-3.

<sup>86</sup> Henson, *Retrospect*, II, p. 91.

<sup>87</sup> *HL Deb.* 63, cc. 431-75, 4 Mar. 1926. See also, National Assembly of the Church of England, *Report of proceedings* 4(1), 30 Jan. 1923, p. 31.

of course, he meant ‘protestant convention’.<sup>88</sup> The division of dioceses was nothing less than a tangential attempt to impose Catholic modes of organisation, and Catholic understanding of the episcopal role, on the English bishops. Future bishops, little more than professional administrators, would be little encouraged or inclined to think independently or act on their own initiative.<sup>89</sup> Less a ‘brotherhood’ than a ‘board’, the bishops would increasingly be content to act under the sage advice of Assembly leaders on spiritual matters and ‘to follow the prevalent official tradition’.<sup>90</sup>

In expressing their opposition to such changes in the House of Lords, Henson and Pollock repudiated the Assembly’s pretensions of ecclesiastical authority. They affirmed the Church’s national character by arguing that, despite the advance of self-government, parliament remained sovereign. The Church had a responsibility to serve the national community, and was thereby responsible to its parliament. Pollock made clear that the determination of the Assembly – and what he derisively called ‘the Society for the Propagation [sic] of More Bishops’ – did not preclude ‘criticisms from those who do not make their voice heard through their own representatives in the Assembly’, including those communities which the Assembly had denied representation of through its franchise.<sup>91</sup>

As the first bishopric bills progressed through the House of Lords, Henson emphasised that parliament had a responsibility ‘of guarding the rights of the English people and the English Church against narrow and mistaken proposals from the National Assembly’; it was parliament, not the Assembly, which represented the English communities which the Church served. Moreover, it represented the nations

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<sup>88</sup> *Times*, 15 Sept. 1922.

<sup>89</sup> *HL Deb.* 58, cc. 131-5, 146, 2 Jul. 1924.

<sup>90</sup> Pollock, *Twentieth century bishop*, pp. 122-3. See also Pollock’s comments on the independence of the clergy, *Times*, 15 Sept. 1922.

<sup>91</sup> Pollock to Long, 19 Sept. 1922, WLP 947/874/14-15; *Times*, 15 Sept. 1922.

of the United Kingdom, and their shared Christian principles which the religious establishment in England affirmed. He entreated the House to reject the measure, ‘and thus set a precedent which will have the most salutary effect on the future proceedings of the so-called National Assembly’.<sup>92</sup>

Henson’s and Pollock’s efforts had mixed success. Ultimately, the peers were unconvinced of the existential repercussions of what were otherwise portrayed as rather humdrum administrative necessities. Pollock was particularly ineffective. He lacked a rebellious instinct or taste for controversy. Rather than raise a cry for the rights of the English people, he sought simply time and opportunity for churchmen to reflect on the reforms. ‘In the vigour of its youth’, he wrote in *The Times*,

the Assembly attempts quickly to deal with many far-reaching questions at once; and it would be unfortunate if it moved too fast and far in any large matter before public opinion had grasped its intentions.<sup>93</sup>

In correspondence with the Unionist peer Viscount Long, a parliamentarian of considerable experience and essentially an Erastian, Pollock investigated the possibility of introducing a resolution in the House on ‘Little Bishoprics’. They hoped to use the parliamentary platform to bring the national significance of diocesan reform to light. Accordingly, they sought ‘a big layman’ to move the resolution in the hope that it might suggest that the issue had ramifications beyond purely ecclesiastical horizons. ‘[S]ome general interest’ might thus be aroused which might reach ‘various people concerned outside of the House’.<sup>94</sup> In essence, Pollock sought to draw ‘the Cecil peers’ into a public debate.<sup>95</sup>

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<sup>92</sup> *HL Deb.* 58, c. 148, 2 Jul. 1924.

<sup>93</sup> *Times*, 15 Sept. 1922.

<sup>94</sup> Pollock to Long, 18 Feb. 1923, WLP 947/877/1-3; Long to Pollock, 22 Feb. 1923, WLP 947/877/6-11.

<sup>95</sup> He also tried to lure them into the open, unsuccessfully, in the columns of *The Times*: *Times*, 15 Sept. 1922; *Times*, 10 Oct. 1922; WLP 947/874, *passim*; WLP 947/877, *passim*.

In terms of the debate in the House of Lords, Pollock's desire to gain the permission of ecclesiastical authorities undermined his cause. In the hope that the Archbishop of Canterbury might deign to participate, the resolution was drafted, and redrafted at the primate's request to reduce its provocative and partisan language.<sup>96</sup> So concerned was Pollock to avoid embarrassing or creating tension with the ecclesiastical authorities, that he even attempted to schedule the debate in order to avoid sittings of the Assembly, lest it politicise the ecclesiastical discussions.<sup>97</sup> Pollock dithered and deferred. 'Some men like to be found in opposition', he told the peers during the debate on the division of the Winchester diocese, 'but certainly I am not one of them'.<sup>98</sup>

Henson was of a different nature entirely. His spirits sank when his views isolated him in the Church, but he had the intellectual ferocity to pursue them vigorously nonetheless. His use of the House as an instrument of ecclesiastical opposition was far more effective than Pollock's. In his speech on the 1924 proposal to divide the Winchester diocese, he repudiated the legislative process of the Enabling Act. He argued that the ecclesiastical committee, which was supposed to report to parliament as to whether proposed measures would affect the rights of any British subject, had failed in its responsibility to provide effective guidance to parliament. Meanwhile, the Assembly had failed to secure the approval of the Church's parishioners for the changes. It was, as such, incumbent on the House to

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<sup>96</sup> Long to Pollock, 22 Feb. 1923, WLP 947/877/6-11; Pollock to Long, 26 Feb. 1923, WLP 947/877/12-21; Pollock to Long, 2 Mar. 1923, WLP 947/877/25-6. While the original draft referred to the financial costs and administrative difficulties of division and called for reflection, the final simply 'call[ed] attention to proposals for the division of dioceses in England and the great need of caution in the matter'.

<sup>97</sup> Pollock to Long, 18 Feb. 1923, WLP 947/877/1-3.

<sup>98</sup> *HL Deb.* 58, c. 133, 2 Jul. 1924.

ask ‘how far [the reforms] really represent the general body of the masses of English Church people, and how they affect the national life’.<sup>99</sup>

So well-received was this speech that, or so Henson believed, had the division been taken when he sat down the measure would have been thrown out.<sup>100</sup> In fact, he feared that his ‘success may be fatal to my purpose’, thinking the bill’s advocates had been frightened into ‘whipping up all their big guns’.<sup>101</sup> Two weeks later the House conferred its approval on the division of the diocese following a debate in which Henson was subject to attack.<sup>102</sup> Given that it was widely accepted among the peers that the reforms would serve a purely administrative purpose, the constitutional arguments Henson had put forward seemed overblown and reactionary.

Henson’s arguments shifted when proposals were later introduced in the House to divide the Hereford diocese and create a new diocese of Shrewsbury. He approached the issue on its proponents’ terms; on grounds of administrative necessity it was being put forward, and on these grounds it could be defeated. Having previously held the see as bishop, he was peculiarly placed to refute the claims that a division was necessary. Hereford already had the smallest population of any diocese in England (except for the Isle of Man) and could boast more communicants per head than any other diocese. He succeeded in persuading some peers, and the measure was defeated by a single vote. The general disposition, Henson recorded in his diary, was ‘to regard it as my victory!’<sup>103</sup>

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<sup>99</sup> Ibid, c. 144.

<sup>100</sup> HP, Henson journal, 2 Jul. 1924.

<sup>101</sup> HP, Henson journal, 3 Jul. 1924.

<sup>102</sup> HP, Henson journal, 16 Jul. 1924.

<sup>103</sup> HP, Henson journal, 4 Mar. 1926.



Among the significant ensuing correspondence Henson received was a letter from Pollock.

I want to fall upon you & embrace you in view of yesterday's victory which you won. It involved issues even more important than itself: & no longer will it be the function of parliament to register the views of the C[hurch] A[ssembly] & E[cclesiastical] Committee.<sup>104</sup>

Henson had discovered that on subjects which seemed, at least on the surface, to be purely administrative, it was a difficult task to rouse the House with a cry to defend the Church's national character. However, although it might be possible to secure the odd victory here and there by adapting his rhetorical approach, he recognised he was ultimately powerless to prevent the direction of ecclesiastical reform. Following the defeat of the diocese of Shrewsbury measure, he recorded his sense of both pride and resignation in his diary. The victory had been 'pleasant enough, but whereto does it lead? The real forces that are controlling the Church of England are not in the House of Lords'.<sup>105</sup>

Lang, Garbett, Henson and Pollock were addressing this same issue, albeit from different directions. Church reforms had helped to establish a new kind of relationship between Church and state, one less dependent on the Church leaders' involvement in the institutions of government and on the congruity of spiritual and secular elite. Yet the conduct of the parliamentary bishops suggested a considerable degree of uncertainty about the Church's role – both desired and actual – in the nation.

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<sup>104</sup> HP, Henson journal, 10 Mar. 1926.

<sup>105</sup> HP, Henson journal, 3 Mar. 1926.

Debates in the House of Lords may have been of little importance for most bishops eligible to attend, but for a notable few it offered a crucial forum in which to assert their understanding of the Church's national role. They were largely motivated by a fear that the Church was becoming – in part due to the character of ecclesiastical self-government – incidental to national life. While Garbett found in the Lords a means to impress upon the Church and state the social teachings of Christianity, Henson and Pollock found a means to resist the 'denominationalisation' of the national Church.

Lang's position was far more fraught. For him, the House provided a platform from which the traditional and emerging responsibilities of the primate could be reconciled. It was a position which, at times, invested him with political significance, though his difficulties mounted as the extent of the political and religious consensus diminished. At such times, it was apparent that Lang lacked clarity about his effective responsibilities; an uncertainty which could have the effect of undermining the causes of both the churches and the state.

The House of Lords retained an important function in the internal Church debate about the nature of the religious establishment. It provided the means by which some ecclesiastical leaders sought to affirm and act on the Church's responsibilities to the whole nation: to all the communities in England, and more broadly still to the British churches and the essential Christian values which the nations of the United Kingdom shared. Though these bishops' parliamentary interventions might on occasion be of some political importance, this was often a secondary consideration. The most important impressions were to be made on churchmen, lay and clerical. The effect was to counteract – even repudiate – the social, political and ecclesiastical narrowing of the national Church's horizons.

# Part 3

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The first chapter of this part will survey the Lords Spiritual's conduct during the period from c. 1945 to 1974. It will place the bishops' rhetoric and conduct in the context of the changing political and ecclesiastical discourse – particularly the growing perception among churchmen of the arrival of the 'secular society'.

Consideration will be given to the Lords Spiritual's contributions on matters of social regulation, community and industrial relations, and foreign affairs, as the most prominent and telling of their interventions.

The following chapter will consider the reasons why new ecclesiastical institutions were developed in the late 1950s – the Lay Secretary and the Board of Social Responsibility – which were intended to change, among other things, the conduct of the parliamentary bishops. It will focus on the work of churchmen from the dioceses of Sheffield – in particular, Leslie Hunter and Edward 'Ted' Wickham. It will demonstrate how the idea that British society was becoming – perhaps had already become – 'secular' changed the way in which the Church positioned itself in social debate, and indeed within the nation.

Having established the provenance and purpose of the new ecclesiastical institutions of the late 1950s, the final chapter will consider their effect. It will focus on the bishops' interventions on matters of the regulation of social conduct and private morality. The bishops' approach to these matters will have been touched upon in the first chapter of this part. In this final chapter, these arguments will be developed, focusing on to the extent of the Lords Spiritual's influence on the 'permissive society', the compromises it required, and the tension between the two.

## 6. The Lords Spiritual, c. 1945-1974

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Until recently, there was a fairly settled consensus that Christianity was a declining and peripheral influence on national life from the late 1950s. Callum Brown has plainly asserted that Christian Britain ‘died’ during the following decade, with the secularisation process advancing rapidly after 1963. In short order, what Brown terms ‘discursive Christianity’ – the extent to which Christian beliefs and rituals infused and defined personal identity and behaviour<sup>1</sup> – collapsed. Rates of participation in Christian rituals – baptisms, confirmations, weddings, etc. – which had undulated gently for a century, entered decline from 1958 and ‘free fall’ from 1963.<sup>2</sup> Perhaps not without cause, it became a commonplace within elite discourses by the early 1960s that British society had entered a ‘secular age’.<sup>3</sup>

In response to their own conception of secularisation during the 1950s and 1960s, the churches sought with varying degrees of success to prevent the overturning of traditional moral and social conduct; or they simply acquiesced, impotent in the face of overwhelming popular and political pressure.<sup>4</sup> By the end of the decade, many of the legal controls which had compelled conformity to traditional Christian practices had been liberalised. Much of the authority which the churches

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<sup>1</sup> Callum Brown, *The death of Christian Britain: understanding secularisation 1800-2000* (Abingdon, 2009), pp. 12-13.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, pp. 187-8. See also ‘British religion in numbers’ [ [www.brin.ac.uk](http://www.brin.ac.uk) ].

<sup>3</sup> Sam Brewitt-Taylor, ‘The invention of a “secular society”? Christianity and the sudden appearance of secularization discourses in the British national media’, *Twentieth-century British history* 24 (2013), pp. 335-46; Brown, *Death*, pp. 1, 181-7; Callum Brown, ‘What was the religious crisis of the 1960s?’, *Journal of religious history* 34 (2010), pp. 468- 79; S.J.D. Green, *The passing of protestant England: secularisation and social change, c. 1920-1960* (Cambridge, 2011), ch. 8, esp. pp. 277-80; Hugh McLeod, *The religious crisis of the 1960s* (Oxford, 2007), ch. 11.

<sup>4</sup> Exemplified by G.I.T. Machin, *Churches and social issues in twentieth-century Britain* (Oxford, 1998); E.R. Norman, *Church and society in England, 1770-1970* (Oxford, 1976), esp. ch. 9. See also Barbara Brookes, *Abortion in England, 1900-1967* (London, 1988), esp. p. 154; Patrick Higgins, *Heterosexual dictatorship: male homosexuality in postwar Britain* (London, 1996), esp. pp. 35-8; Hugh McLeod, ‘God and the gallows: Christianity and capital punishment in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries’, *Studies in Church history* 40 (2004), esp. p. 351.

had once had on issues of personal morality and social relations accrued instead to those who could demonstrate empirical proof and professional expertise – medical practitioners, psychologists, social workers, lawyers. The process peaked in 1967, when laws on the conduct of male homosexuality, abortion and contraception were liberalised.<sup>5</sup>

Despite this apparent decline in the national authority of Christianity, a developing body of literature has asserted the persistence of the Church's intellectual and political influence. Consideration has been given to the dynamics by which the 'permissive society' was defined and pursued. It is argued that Church committees which sought to reconcile Christian ethical values with contemporary patterns of thought had an important role in defining the parameters by which questions of sexuality were understood.<sup>6</sup> Through these reports, Church leaders were able to exert considerable influence on the formulation of permissive legislation, and indeed in securing popular and parliamentary support for its passage.<sup>7</sup> More widely, it has been shown that discussions within the Church on the nature of social and religious change had a significant influence on elite and, ultimately, popular discourses on national identity. Indeed, internal ecclesiastical debates helped to popularise the very

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<sup>5</sup> G.I.T. Machin, 'British Churches and moral change in the 1960s', in W.M. Jacob and Nigel Yates (eds.), *Crown and mitre: religion and society in northern Europe since the Reformation* (Woodbridge, 1993), pp. 223-41; Machin, *Churches and social issues*, chs. 5 and 6; Norman, *Church and society*, chs. 9 and 10.

<sup>6</sup> Timothy Jones, *Sexual politics in the Church of England, 1857-1957* (Oxford, 2013), esp. pp. 162-82; Laura Ramsay, 'The ambiguities of Christian sexual discourse in post-war Britain: the British Council of Churches and its early moral welfare work', *Journal of religious history* 40 (2016), pp. 82-103; Graham Willett, 'The Church of England and the origins of homosexual law reform', *Journal of religious history* 33 (2009), pp. 418-34.

<sup>7</sup> Stephen Cretney, *Law, law reform and the family* (Oxford, 1998), ch. 2; Matthew Grimley, 'Law, morality and secularisation: the Church of England and the Wolfenden Report, 1954-1967', *Journal of ecclesiastical history* 60 (2009), pp. 725-41; Jane Lewis and Patrick Wallis, 'Fault, breakdown, and the Church of England's involvement in the 1969 divorce reform', *Twentieth century history* 11 (2000), pp. 308-32.

notion of the ‘secular society’, leading to its wide acceptance among political elites and the media before any significant demographic change had become apparent.<sup>8</sup>

The ‘death’ of discursive Christianity, it will be shown, was not accompanied by political obsolescence. Quite the reverse. The Church’s national decline, the demographic and legal undermining of the religious establishment, was met by a dramatic re-engagement with institutional politics. The increasing frequency of episcopal interventions in the House seemed closely related to the dynamics of Church decline. As the indicators of Christian affiliation began to falter after 1958, the bishops’ contributions increased; when these indicators entered ‘free fall’ after 1963, the number of episcopal interventions increased again at a faster, historically exceptional rate.

This was not primarily a response to political stimuli – for example, the increasing expectations placed on regular participation in debates of members of the House of Lords, particularly after 1958. Rather, it was a response to the changing patterns of social practice and discourse in the country. In their contributions to House of Lords debates, the bishops self-consciously eschewed the notion that they derived their moral authority from scriptural dogma or denominational tradition. However, they did not casually – or even cynically – adopt contemporary values in order to maintain social and political relevance.<sup>9</sup> If the ‘secular society’ was to flourish, so influential Church leaders argued, it needed a sense of the transcendental, of purpose beyond the relentless march of economic prosperity.

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<sup>8</sup> Brewitt-Taylor, ‘Secular society’, pp. 327-50; Sam Brewitt-Taylor, ‘Christianity and the invention of the sexual revolution in Britain, 1963-1967’, *Historical journal* [published online 3 Jun. 2016], pp. 1-16.

<sup>9</sup> See, for example, O.R. McGregor, ‘Equality, sexual values and permissive legislation: the English experience’, *Journal of social policy* 1 (1972), esp. pp. 56-7; Norman, *Church and society*, esp. ch. 9; B.H. Lee, *Divorce law reform in England* (London, 1974), pp. 54-7.

Participation in the House came to serve a vital spiritual function, enabling the bishops to secure influence over the developing values of the ‘secular society’.

For the most part, the Lords Spiritual’s conduct in the House during the 1950s broadly conformed to inter-war patterns. That is to say, there was a very low level of engagement, with most interventions made by only a handful of bishops. A notable spike is apparent in episcopal contributions to the House immediately after 1945. However, this was a result less of increased vigour from the bishops’ bench, than the coincidence of particular moral questions in the aftermath of the war. Of particular concern were issues relating to the plight of refugees and displaced populations on the European continent, and the moral implications and regulation of atomic weapons.<sup>10</sup> As these crises passed, the Lords Spiritual’s conduct returned to the established inter-war norms. By the early 1950s the bishops’ average sessional contributions were less than half that recorded at the end of the war [see fig. 2 below].<sup>11</sup> Such was the decline that an episcopal presence during debates on issues concerning the moral conduct of family life, on which the Church had historically made strong representations, could no longer be guaranteed.<sup>12</sup>

The mid-1950s represented the nadir for the participation of the bishops in the House of Lords; fewer interventions were made by the bishops during this period than at any other point in the century. As in the 1930s, a coterie of particularly enthusiastic bishops accounted for the vast majority of contributions. More than half

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<sup>10</sup> These trends were particularly evident in the contributions of George Bell. See for example, *HL Deb.* 143, cc. 1033-9, 6 Nov. 1946; *HL Deb.* 138, cc. 51-6, 27 Nov. 1945. See also, Dianne Kirby, ‘The Church of England and the Cold War nuclear debate’, *Twentieth-century British history* 4 (1993), pp. 250-83.

<sup>11</sup> See critical contemporary comment from within the Church on the level of episcopal participation in the House of Lords in Cyril Garbett, *Church and state* (London, 1950), p. 103; Charles Smyth, *Cyril Forster Garbett* (London, 1959), p. 436.

<sup>12</sup> Only Garbett, for example, contributed to a debate on euthanasia in 1951. *HL Deb.* 169, cc. 562-5, 28 Nov. 1950.

came from Geoffrey Fisher, George Bell, or Cyril Garbett. However, as the 1950s proceeded, these bishops' participation too declined.

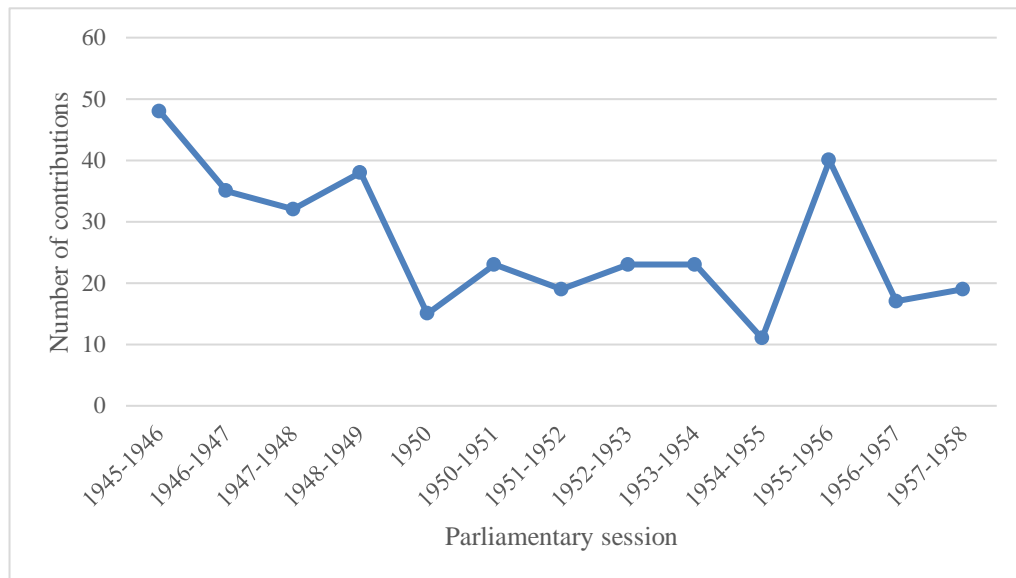


Fig. 2. Total episcopal contributions to House of Lords debates, parliamentary sessions 1945 to 1958.

Garbett was highly active after the war, not only on the housing matters which had been compounded by bombing,<sup>13</sup> but also on foreign affairs. He had developed a close relationship with the Foreign Office during the war, arguably at times acting as the ministry's representative during trips abroad.<sup>14</sup> However, already aged 70 in 1945, his failing health limited his ability to attend the House of Lords. He reluctantly retired in 1955. Although his work in the House was to be recognised with a peerage, he died in December 1955. Bell's ecumenical interests meanwhile were drawing him into other fields. He had been elected moderator of the central

<sup>13</sup> See for example, *HL Deb.* 137, cc. 825-31, 13 Nov. 1945.

<sup>14</sup> Dianne Kirby, *Church, state and propaganda: the Archbishop of York and international relations, a political study of Cyril Foster Garbett, 1942-1955* (Hull, 1998); Dianne Kirby, 'The Archbishop of York and Anglo-American relations during the Second World War and early Cold War, 1942-1955', *Journal of religious history* 23 (1999), pp. 327-45.



committee of the World Council of Churches in 1948, becoming its president in 1954 before retiring from the episcopate in 1957.<sup>15</sup>

More significantly, as the archbishopric of Canterbury passed from Lang, to Temple, to Fisher, the incumbent had taken a diminished role in the House. As this thesis has shown, the primate had historically assumed a central role among the parliamentary bishops, his attendance exceeding that of other Lords Spiritual. Yet on average Fisher made four times fewer contributions than, for example, Lang. There was in fact little difference in the rate of Fisher's participation as Bishop of London and later as Archbishop of Canterbury. After the 1950-1951 parliamentary session, though in the past the archbishop had often been required to assure the House of the wisdom of ecclesiastical reform, Fisher hardly even participated in the passage of Church measures. His last contributions on these came in 1953, despite the fact that he remained in office until 1961.

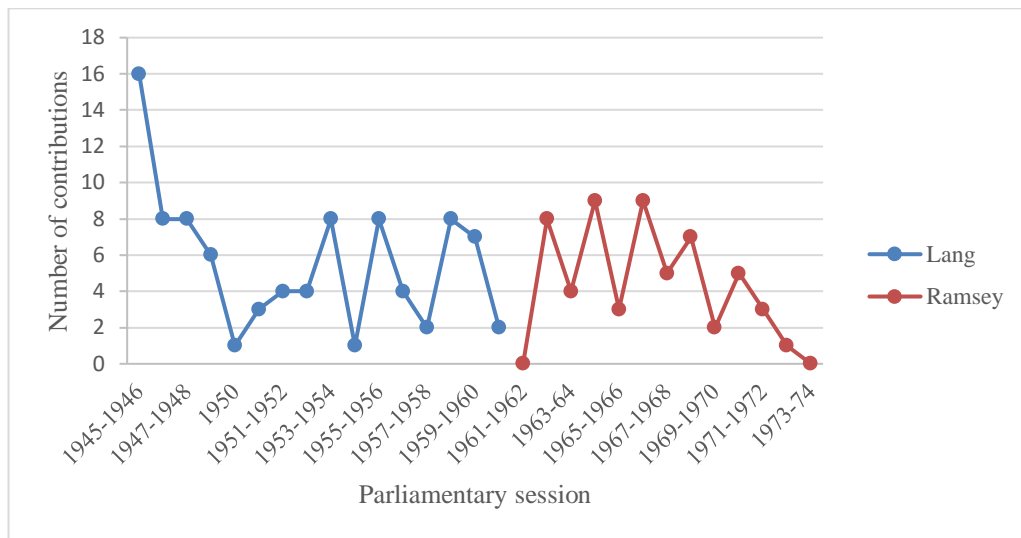
The pressures of the archiepiscopal office had continued to grow apace. Fisher became weighed down by the pressures of internal Church administration, liturgical reform, and, perhaps most of all, the reinvigoration and expansion of the global Anglican Communion.<sup>16</sup> Despite numerous interventions in matters of foreign affairs and moral conduct, under the weight of increasing ecclesiastical pressures the archbishop's participation in the House was diminished – certainly in contrast with the records of Davidson or Lang. This was as true for Fisher as it was for his successor, Michael Ramsey – there was, in fact, little difference in the frequency of

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<sup>15</sup> Andrew Chandler, “‘The Church and Humanity’: George Bell and the life of the Church in the twentieth century”, *The Church and humanity: the life and works of George Bell, 1883-1958* (Farnham, 2012), pp. 1-24.

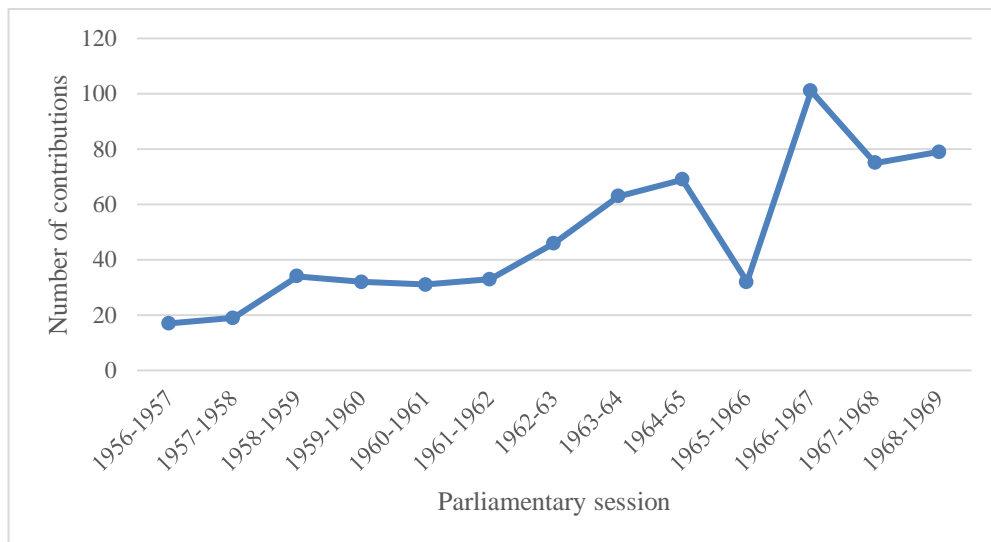
<sup>16</sup> See, for example, Edward Carpenter, *Cantuar: archbishops in their office* (London, 1998), pp. 490-500; David Hein, *Geoffrey Fisher: Archbishop of Canterbury* (Cambridge, 2008), xiii; William Purcell, *Fisher of Lambeth: a portrait from life* (London, 1969), p. 202.

the primate's contributions as the archiepiscopacy exchanged hands in 1961 [see fig. 3 below].



*Fig. 3. Contributions to House of Lords debates by the archbishops of Canterbury, parliamentary sessions 1945 to 1974.*

Despite the apparent continuity in the participation of the Archbishop of Canterbury in the House, from the late 1950s there was a clear – actually, quite a dramatic – shift in the parliamentary conduct of the bishops' bench. From the 1957 to 1959 parliamentary sessions, the number of episcopal parliamentary contributions increased by 80 *per cent*. The increase was sustained to 1963, after which the number of episcopal contributions continued to increase in successive sessions [see figure 4 below].



*Fig. 4. Total episcopal contributions to House of Lords debates, parliamentary sessions 1956 to 1969.*

These increased levels of participation were not the result of the exceptional enthusiasm of any particular bishop, or that of a small group of bishops. Rather, they were driven by sustained increases in activity across the whole bench. After 1958, the number of contributions made by the bishops of lesser sees, allowing for some minor fluctuations due to varying lengths of parliamentary sessions, increased in each successive year. The burden of intervention in the House was assumed by an ever-larger number of the bishops.<sup>17</sup> In general, for sessions in the early 1950s fewer than ten bishops could be expected to speak in the House; by the late-1960s it was not unusual for twenty or more to do so. Stockwood of Southwark, Ellison of Chester and from 1973 London, Wilson of Chichester, Phillips of Portsmouth, and Jones of St. Albans, among others, all achieved a significant presence in the House. Although there is some correlation between proximity to London and frequency of

<sup>17</sup> See also, comments in Gavin Drewry and Jenny Brock, 'Prelates in parliament', *Parliamentary affairs* 24 (1970), pp. 229-30.

participation in the House, there was clearly a significant broadening of the episcopal voices in the House.

All this suggests growing structure to the bishops' approach to the House – there was a degree of orchestration. There was certainly an increasing tendency for bishops to intervene in debates whenever possible, particularly during the weeks in which they were required to attend sittings in the House to open the proceedings with prayer.<sup>18</sup> Edward Jones of St. Albans, contributing to a debate on 'Space Research' in 1961, noted 'I have no scientific training, and if I had not had the privilege of reading Prayers in your Lordships' House, I should not have ventured to put down my name to speak in this debate'.<sup>19</sup>

More prominently still, there was an increasingly obvious trend for bishops to contribute on the basis of policy portfolios, and for them to lead the other bishops in the debate (if not to speak directly on their behalf). For example, the majority of Robert Mortimer of Exeter's contributions were devoted to matters of criminal and matrimonial law. Similarly, although a great many bishops contributed to the passage of Church measures, Ellison and Ronald Williams of Leicester assumed a pre-eminence in this work.

The evident structure in the bishops' engagement with parliamentary debates can largely be attributed to the creation in the late 1950s of specific ecclesiastic institutions to support the work of the Lords Spiritual. The mechanisms and provenance of these changes will be considered in greater detail in later chapters. In the present context, it will suffice to note the role of the Archbishop of Canterbury's

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<sup>18</sup> Drewry and Brock, 'Prelates', pp. 242-3. See also, Beloe note, 4 Dec. 1967, RP 134/1.

<sup>19</sup> *HL Deb.* 236, c. 116, 6 Dec. 1961.

Lay Secretary in enhancing the capabilities of the parliamentary bishops.<sup>20</sup> He took responsibility for building up contacts with government and party offices, securing access to better information on the nature and timing of upcoming parliamentary business. With this information, he was able both to brief bishops in advance of their known attendance in the House, and to alert and encourage those who might possess a particular interest in the topics to be discussed.<sup>21</sup>

Clearly, after 1958, efforts were being made to increase the participation of bishops in the House. Drewry and Brock attributed the increases to the advent of a Labour government in 1964.<sup>22</sup> The liberalising social legislation which emerged during Harold Wilson's tenure as prime minister was certainly of particular interest to the Lords Spiritual. The high level of episcopal participation in the parliamentary session of 1966-1967 can in part be attributed to this. This session included debates on the termination of pregnancy, homosexuality, Sunday entertainment and education, among other issues of doctrinal and ecclesiastical concern. Yet the scale of the episcopal engagement on these particular issues was not particularly exceptional. The increase over the decade was sustained and cumulative. Over the last five sessions of the 1960s, the number of episcopal contributions was still treble that of the comparable period 10 years prior.

More persuasive perhaps is Donald Shell's suggestion that the increase in the bishops' participation was prompted by the broader professionalization of the peerage and the House of Lord's processes. The expectations of participation in the

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<sup>20</sup> Later known as the Archbishop's Secretary for Public Affairs. Medhurst and Moyser described the post as the archbishop's 'Chief of Staff': Kenneth Medhurst and George Moyser, 'Lambeth Palace, the bishops and politics', in George Moyser (ed.), *Church and politics today: the role of the Church of England in contemporary politics* (Edinburgh, 1985), pp. 99-100.

<sup>21</sup> Francis Bown, 'Influencing the House of Lords: the role of the Lords Spiritual, 1979-1987', *Political studies* 42 (1994), pp. 105-19; Cretney, *Law, law reform, family*, p. 44; H. G. Judge, 'Beloe, Robert (1905-1984)', ODNB.

<sup>22</sup> Drewry and Brock, 'Prelates', pp. 222-50.

House had changed, and the bishops responded accordingly.<sup>23</sup> The Life Peerages Act of 1958 was of particular significance.<sup>24</sup> Though it did not dramatically redress the party imbalance, or even broaden the social or economic pool from which the peerage was drawn, its effect was to considerably increase the number of active peers in the House. With this, came a change in the chamber's ethos.<sup>25</sup> From 1959 to 1966, the average daily attendance of peers almost doubled.<sup>26</sup> Expectations grew that members should contribute regularly, especially when they possessed particular expertise or knowledge in the subject of the debate. Debate on some matters, such as the Industrial Relations Bill 1971, far surpassed the sophistication of anything hitherto displayed in the upper chamber. The House regained its confidence, asserting its authority with increasing regularity – particularly after Labour's return to office.<sup>27</sup> 'The House of Lords', wrote John Vincent in 1966, reflecting on recent developments, 'is not what it was'.<sup>28</sup>

Though the Lords Spiritual secured an effective exemption from new Standing Orders to relieve absent peers of their place in the House,<sup>29</sup> the bishops

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<sup>23</sup> See Donald Shell, *The House of Lords* (Oxford, 1988), p. 44.

<sup>24</sup> Other changes of significance included the payment of peers' expenses for attending the House from 1957, the Standing Order of 1958 which permitted peers to take a leave of absence, and the Peerage Act of 1963 which, among other things, enabled hereditary peerages to be disclaimed. For broader context, see Chris Ballinger, *The House of Lords, 1911-2011: a century of non-reform* (Oxford, 2012), pp. 77-97; Peter Dorey, 'Change in order to conserve: explaining the decision to introduce the 1958 Life Peerages Act', *Parliamentary history* 28 (2009), pp. 246-65.

<sup>25</sup> Janet Morgan, *The House of Lords and the Labour government* (Oxford, 1975), ch. 1; Shell, *House of Lords* (Oxford, 1988), pp. 17-21, 33-42; P.A. Bromhead, *The House of Lords and contemporary politics, 1911-1957* (London, 1958), ch. 3; John Vincent 'The House of Lords', *Parliamentary affairs* 19 (1966), pp. 475-85. See also Alex Brocklehurst, 'Peerage creations, 1958-2008', *House of Lords Library note*, LLN 2008/019, pp. 11-19; Thomas Brown and Matthew Purvis, 'Life Peerages created since 1958', *Lords in focus*, LIF-2016-0040.

<sup>26</sup> Ballinger, *House of Lords*, p. 97.

<sup>27</sup> See, for example, comments on the debate on the London Government bill 1963. Shell, *House of Lords*, p. 17.

<sup>28</sup> John Vincent, 'The House of Lords', *Parliamentary affairs* 19 (1966), pp. 475-85.

<sup>29</sup> Under the Standing Order, members of the House who had not attended in the previous session would be asked by the Lord Chancellor if they wished to apply for a leave of absence for the following parliamentary session. Although this applied to all members of the House – including the Lords Spiritual – it was made clear by the Lord Chancellor's office that there was no expectation that the bishops should apply for leave. Fisher to Home, 8 May 1958, FP 204/225; Home to Fisher, 12

could not escape the mood of the age – they were, after all, the very personification of the House’s archaic nature. Labour life peers, particularly those possessing increasingly influential professional qualifications, were especially prone to criticise, publicly and privately, the conduct of the parliamentary bishops.

To Baroness Edith Summerskill, medical practitioner and Labour life peer, since the passage of the Life Peerages Act the House had become ‘an important body of specialists’ with ‘a great deal of expert knowledge’. Little she had seen or heard from the bishops’ bench justified their continued place in such a chamber. While the bench filled during debates on Church doctrine or ceremonial, the Lords Spiritual were on occasion entirely absent when matters of social concern were debated. Even then, when they spoke – ‘which is seldom’ – they ‘gave the impression of not being masters of their subject’, reluctant to deviate from their carefully prepared notes. They were uncommitted, politically uncourageous and limited to ‘pious generalities’.<sup>30</sup> Another Labour life peer, the playwright Ted Willis, aired similar concerns in the House in July 1964.<sup>31</sup> The bishops of London and Southwark were reprimanded by veteran Labour statesman Lord Morrison of Lambeth for publicly protesting about the housing problems, while absenting themselves from a Lords debate on Rachmanism.<sup>32</sup> Morrison was a regular critic on the bishops’ conduct, having previously drawn an apology (of sorts) from Ronald Williams of Leicester over the absence of Lords Spiritual during the second reading of the 1963

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May 1958, FP 204/226; Coldstream to Jay, 19 Jun. 1958, FP 204/228; Bishops’ Meeting, 14-15 Oct. 1958, BM 14/221.

<sup>30</sup> Simon to Ramsey, 26 May 1964, RP 58/285; Summerskill to Stockwood, 14 Jul. 1964, RP 58/294. See also, *HL Deb.* 259, c. 1085, 8 Jul. 1964.

<sup>31</sup> *HL Deb.* 260, c. 289, 15 Jul. 1964. Beloe to Stockwood, 10 Jul. 1964, RP 58/291; Stockwood to Beloe, 17 Jul. 194, RP 58/292. For context see John Maiden and Peter Webster, ‘Parliament, the Church of England and the last gasp of political Protestantism’, *Parliamentary history* 32 (2013), pp. 361-77.

<sup>32</sup> *Daily Mirror*, 30 Jun. 1953; Stockwood to Summerskill, 10 Jul. 1964, RP 58/293.

Matrimonial Causes and Reconciliation Bill.<sup>33</sup> Though most criticisms came from Labour life peers, even the Conservative Whips' Office warned Church authorities that the bishops' bench was coming under 'considerable criticism' from peers. They had seemingly developed a practice of leaving the chamber immediately after speaking, rather than remaining to hear the government's reply.<sup>34</sup>

The flurry of correspondence which resulted from the criticisms of the Labour life peers and the Conservative Whips' office showed that Church authorities were sensitive to the increased expectations resting on participation in the House.<sup>35</sup>

Inferential in Drewry's and Brock's and in Shell's comments on the bishops' increasing parliamentary enthusiasm is the idea that the Church had adopted a more rigorous, structured approach towards the House of Lords in response to political stimuli. Such arguments, however, do not take adequate account of the bishops' peculiar position between both Church and state. The bishops' conduct in the House was actually the result of a much broader ecclesiastical response to the perception of the secularisation of British society. Indeed, it is startling how the chronology of the declining membership of the churches corresponded to changes in the engagement of Lords Spiritual. As the churches experienced a post-war revival in popular support – albeit short-lived – the position of the Lords Spiritual in the House had diminished further. Conversely, as popular support began to decline from 1958, the participation of the bishops in parliament increased, as it did again as the decline accelerated after 1963.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> *HL Deb.* 250, cc. 392-3, 22 May 1963.

<sup>34</sup> Beloe to Henderson, 4 Apr. 1962, RP 21/235; Henderson to Beloe, 6 Apr. 1962, RP 21/238-9.

<sup>35</sup> See for example, Beloe to Southwark, 20 Jul. 1964, RP 58/296-7.

<sup>36</sup> See Brown, *Death*, pp. 187-8.



Church leaders, broadly speaking, had come to accept the existence of the ‘secular society’. With this acceptance came a conviction that it was essential – perhaps more essential than ever before – that the values of the emerging society be influenced as far as possible by Christian ethical principles. In facing the overpowering advance of industrial and consumerist culture, they advocated the retention of those spiritual influences which bound communities together, which gave them a sense of shared interests and interdependence. Similarly, in approaching issues of foreign policy, they provided a Christian witness, advocating those principles which had enabled international communion and co-operation between Christians. When issues of sexual conduct arose, the bishops adopted a crucial role in establishing the balance of individuals’ rights – or, as one leading bishop termed it, adjudicating between the ‘moral claims’ invoked.<sup>37</sup> In all this, their role was complementary to the developing patterns of debate in the House; they did not seek to stand in the way of ‘progress’, but rather to help to direct it.

The most prominent and well-studied aspect of the Lords Spiritual’s engagement in the House during this period related to their participation in debates on social reform which followed the advent of the first Wilson ministry. These matters of social regulation and authority had accounted for fewer than one in ten episcopal contributions in the decade to 1958. However, their relative prominence doubled over the following decade, an especially impressive statistic given the general increase in the number of interventions made by the Lords Spiritual.

Yet despite the growing episcopal presence in relation to these issues, the bishops sought to distance themselves from the notion that they, *per se*, spoke

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<sup>37</sup> G.R. Dunstan, ‘The authority of a moral claim: Ian Ramsey and the practice of medicine’, *Journal of medical ethics* 13 (1987), pp. 189-94; Ian T. Ramsey, ‘Christian ethics in the 1960s and 1970s’, *Church quarterly* 2 (1969), pp. 221-7.

specifically on the basis of Christian ethical authority. In fact, the tone of episcopal contributions on matters of moral governance became notably less doctrinally and Biblically specific.

During the 1948 debates on suspension of capital punishment, such claims had been reasonably commonplace. Mervyn Haigh of Winchester for example spoke of ‘Christian principle’ and the ‘official view of the Church of England’, both of which he asserted were compatible with capital punishment. He pointed to the thirty-seventh Article of Religion, which the primate claimed provided ‘that for sufficiently heinous offences Christian men may be put to death’.<sup>38</sup> Maurice Key of Truro, less senior than Haigh and clearly less able to articulate a view on behalf of ‘the Church’, made reference instead to Genesis: ‘Whoso sheddeth man’s blood, by man shall his blood be shed’.<sup>39</sup> It was on the basis of such Biblical and doctrinal insight that some opposing peers assailed Haigh and Key. Lord Rochester, a Methodist lay preacher and Labour peer, confessed difficulty reconciling the bishops’ words ‘with the admonition of their Master, and mine, in St. Mark XI, 25’.<sup>40</sup>

These prelatical tones diminished as the 1950s progressed. Despite the fact that, as Hugh McLeod has pointed out, religious arguments were more regularly used to make the case for abolition of capital punishment, as the bishops moved towards abolitionism during the 1950s and 1960s in debates in the Lords they set aside their Biblical and doctrinal arguments.<sup>41</sup> In 1956, William Greer of Manchester refused to speak as a ‘moralist’ or to take a ‘holier than thou’ attitude on the death penalty.<sup>42</sup> Indeed, the Liberal Lord Teviot, retentionist and thorough opponent of social and

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<sup>38</sup> *HL Deb.* 155, cc. 424-5, 27 Apr. 1948.

<sup>39</sup> *HL Deb.* 155, c. 481, 28 Apr. 1948.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, c. 536.

<sup>41</sup> Hugh McLeod, ‘God and the gallows’, p. 352.

<sup>42</sup> *HL Deb.* 198, c. 714, 10 Jul. 1956.

political change in general, intervened to complain that not enough reference had been made by the episcopal bench to passages in the Testaments.<sup>43</sup> In 1965, Ramsey as Archbishop of Canterbury placed emphasis on the intrinsic value of human life, much as Haigh had. However, his comments rested less on Biblical or doctrinal directive, than on apparent personal reflection.<sup>44</sup> The only member of the bench to refer directly to the Bible during the 1965 debates was Donald Coggan of York – and even then seemingly only to reply to retentionists in their own terms.<sup>45</sup>

A form of ‘lexical secularisation’ had taken place, of a kind which might seem to chime well with the well-known arguments of E.R. Norman, that senior clergy inexorably conformed to contemporary intellectual and moral fashion.<sup>46</sup> The parliamentary bishops seemed to have abandoned what remained of the doctrinal or Biblical basis for their arguments. However, the scriptural authority which they seemed to disclaim was not replaced by a simple pandering to popular, or even lay opinion. In fact, by the 1960s they claimed a large measure of independence from public opinion.

In 1948, Fisher acknowledged that he had taken into account that ‘public opinion is in the main against’ the suspension of the death penalty. Though he noted that popular belief did not always rest on sure ground, ‘the fact, if it be a fact, is significant’.<sup>47</sup> Bell, the only Lord Spiritual to vote in favour of a suspension of the death penalty, pointed the way to the bishops’ future conduct. If public opinion was to be of significance, he argued, it needed to be ‘well informed and [have] the proper

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid, cc. 720-1.

<sup>44</sup> *HL Deb.* 268, cc. 633-8, 20 Jul. 1965.

<sup>45</sup> *HL Deb.* 269, cc. 534-8, 26 Oct. 1965.

<sup>46</sup> Norman, *Church and society*.

<sup>47</sup> *HL Deb.* 156, c. 45, 1 Jun. 1948. See also Bloomer of Carlisle’s comments during debates on the legalisation of homosexual conduct, *HL Deb.* 206, cc. 814-19, 4 Dec. 1957.

evidence before it'.<sup>48</sup> The implication, of course, was that on matters of ethical nuance, these conditions were rarely met.

As the 1960s proceeded, the parliamentary bishops distanced themselves from the currents of popular opinion. Bell's successor, Roger Wilson, warned the peers during the second reading debate of the Murder (Abolition of Death Penalty) Bill in 1965 of the perils of following behind public opinion: 'it is certainly not our business to wait for public opinion in such an important issue'.<sup>49</sup> The bishops' growing disregard for public attitudes earned them a rebuke from the former Lord Chancellor, the Earl of Kilmuir. 'I never thought that I should see the day', he claimed, 'when public opinion would be swept aside and sneered at from the Bench of Bishops and every other part of this House'.<sup>50</sup> Such admonitions had little effect on the bishops. Coggan subsequently urged parliamentarians to provide the nation with clear direction.

[L]et us by an overwhelming vote in [the Bill's] favour say to the country, whether they be ready for our lead or not – and if we are not here to give a lead, what are we here for? – 'We will give this a fair trial ... now, in 1965, let us be done with this relic of a bygone age. We in this House invite you to follow our lead. Have done with this thing! In the name of God, let it go!'<sup>51</sup>

Rather than appeal to scripture or to popular sentiment, the Lords Spiritual increasingly claimed a role as Christian ethicists. They worked within the developing discourses on personal morality which marginalised traditional and scriptural formulations on conduct, and now sought to reconcile contemporary scientific and legal insights with fundamental Christian teachings. In relating to a society which

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<sup>48</sup> *HL Deb.* 156, c. 123, 2 Jun. 1948.

<sup>49</sup> *HL Deb.* 268, c. 527, 19 Jul. 1965.

<sup>50</sup> *HL Deb.* 268, c. 642, 20 Jul. 1965.

<sup>51</sup> *HL Deb.* 269, c. 538, 26 Oct. 1965.

they regarded as – and which increasingly identified itself as – ‘secular’, traditional Christian formulations of social relations could not be simply insisted upon. Rather, authority was derived from the application of Christian ethical insights to the ‘social reality’ as determined by secular experts.

In this task, ecclesiastical leaders were aided by the development of Church committees under the Church Assembly’s Board for Social Responsibility (BSR), established in 1958, which sought to supplement Christian insight with academic, legal, medical, and scientific expertise. The BSR’s work was clearly inspired by that of the Moral Welfare Council (MWC), which had become a council of the Church Assembly in 1952 and which was subsumed by the BSR in 1958.

The MWC described itself as ‘the central council of the Church for the co-ordination of thought and action in relation to sex, marriage and the family in the Christian life’.<sup>52</sup> To this end, for much of its history the MWC had conducted ‘education and remedial work’, training welfare workers and attempting to bridge the division between ecclesiastical and state welfare agencies.<sup>53</sup> However, it was most influential in the production of a series of reports on family issues from the mid-1950s. These were less concerned with the particulars of theology or scripture, than with the application of Christian ethical insight to contemporary scientific and legal thinking. As Ian Ramsey, Bishop of Durham from 1966, noted in 1969 of the landmark MWC report *The family in contemporary society*, ‘the status of the theology used in the argument was subordinate to the moral claim which, in one way

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<sup>52</sup> Quoted in Willett, ‘Origins’, p. 424.

<sup>53</sup> By 1957, there were at least five hundred associated agencies at work in England and Wales, variously advised, staffed and trained by the MWC. Minutes of first meeting of provisional BSR, 15 Oct. 1957, BSR/BD/D/1/SR1. See also, Timothy Jones, ‘Moral welfare and social well-being: the Church of England and the emergence of modern homosexuality’, in Lucy Delap and Sue Morgan (eds.), *Men, masculinities and religious change in twentieth-century Britain* (Basingstoke, 2013), pp. 199-205; Ramsay ‘Ambiguities’, pp. 88-91.

or another, it was endeavouring to articulate'. In the 'new era' of ethical understanding which the report signalled, the first condition in reaching a Christian moral decision was 'that we shall do as much justice as possible to the empirical details of the actual situation'.<sup>54</sup>

Such committees exerted considerable influence on the formulation of permissive legislation during the 1960s.<sup>55</sup> The bishops' association – whether direct or indirect – with these reports certainly enhanced their influence in the House of Lords. It is notable that Mortimer, and in his absence Ronald Williams of Leicester, both closely associated with the BSR, assumed a prominent position in debating ethical matters in the House.

However, the bishops did not overtly claim to speak *for* these Church organisations. When they referred directly to the reports, it was often in the context of proposing the Church as a suitable partner for the state in formulating policy. For example, in light of the widely-acknowledged poor drafting of the 1965 Abortion Bill, Stockwood suggested that the government call a Select Committee which would consider 'the advice of the Churches, the medical profession, the legal profession, psychiatric and social workers, together with other interested parties'.<sup>56</sup> Mortimer meanwhile proposed that the bill should be referred to 'some body which could consult with doctors, with lawyers, and with social workers, as well as, perhaps, with the clergy' for redrafting. Both Stockwood and Mortimer acknowledged that the BSR was in the process of producing a report on abortion which policy-makers might wish to consider before arriving at a decision. Mortimer

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<sup>54</sup> Ramsey, 'Christian ethics', pp. 221-2. See also, *The family in contemporary society* (London, 1958), esp. p. 120. These ideas will be discussed further in chapter 8.

<sup>55</sup> Grimley, 'Law, morality, secularisation', pp. 725-41; Jones, 'Moral welfare', 205-11; Lewis and Wallis, 'Fault', pp. 308-32.

<sup>56</sup> *HL Deb.* 270, c. 1162, 30 Nov. 1965.

in particular noted that the first draft had been completed, and though it was not his place to comment on the quality of its drafting, ‘it is there and it could serve as a base’ for drafting a new bill.<sup>57</sup>

There was, however, a sense that the bishops’ bench seemed to act in concert, speaking not for the Church, nor for the laity or the ‘nation’, but for itself. During the debates on the Abortion bill in 1965, Mortimer claimed to seek ‘to try to make as crystal clear’ as he could ‘the attitude of these Benches both to abortion in general and to this Bill in particular’.<sup>58</sup> Through the creation of bodies like the MWC and BSR, the Church sought a more discursive relationship with the state; the Church occupied its own sphere, but could bring to bear the benefits of its insights to the work of the state. The parliamentary bishops were part of this dialogue, applying their particular insight to that gleaned by state and Church bodies. Sharing a desire to relate Christian belief to the social discourse, the bishops demonstrated a growing ‘causalist’ concern for personal and societal ‘welfare’ – that is to say, a growing utilitarian interest in minimising the observable harm caused by moral injunctions and decisions, over and above abstract notions of ‘justice’.<sup>59</sup>

The bishops’ shifting concerns, first to defend moral standards and later to reduce suffering and promote welfare, were particularly apparent in their approach to the abortion laws. Prompted by a Private Member’s bill in 1961, a MWC commission, chaired by Ian Ramsey, issued a report in 1965 which emphasised the right of a potential mother to her life and health, over and above that of her

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid, c. 1233.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid, c. 1230.

<sup>59</sup> Christie Davies, ‘From the sacred hierarchies to flatland’, *Centre for the study of religion and society* 23 (1990), pp. 1-12; John Anderson, ‘The tory party at prayer? The Church of England and British politics in the 1950s’, *Journal of Church and state* 58 (2016), pp. 24-33.

prospective children.<sup>60</sup> The balancing of ‘moral claims’ was at the heart of *Abortion: an ethical discussion*. The foetus was sacred and had a right to existence. However, the rights of the mother also had to be recognised; to her life, and to her health. The central problem the report considered was the ‘weighting’ of these claims when they were in conflict. The conclusion was reached that the known effects on the mother of carrying a pregnancy to term must take precedence over the claims of the foetus; the mother’s rights were ‘real’, and must supersede the rights of the foetus as a ‘potential’ life. It recommended abortion be made permissible in circumstances where the continuation of a pregnancy posed a threat to mother’s life, or her mental and physical well-being, or that of her family, taking in the mother’s ‘total environment’ as far as it could be reasonably assessed or foreseen.

This was the line around which most of the bishops’ parliamentary contributions were oriented. Mortimer expressed this most clearly. While he had once believed that ‘the foetus becomes a member of the human race at the moment of its conception’, he had come to recognise that an unborn child was ‘not a member of the human race in the ordinary sense of those words, but that it has a potentiality of so becoming’. Since the foetus only had a ‘potentiality of humanity’, he continued, the rights of the mother, ‘who has already passed from the potential to the real’, took precedence.<sup>61</sup>

The bishops’ concern was not simply for the welfare of the individuals directly implicated in such issues, but also for those tangentially affected and, indeed, for society more generally. This became apparent during the various debates

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<sup>60</sup> *Abortion: an ethical discussion* (London, 1965); Owen Chadwick, *Michael Ramsey: a life* (Oxford, 1991), pp. 153-5.

<sup>61</sup> *HL Deb.* 270, c. 1231, 30 Nov. 1965. See also Dunstan, ‘Authority of a moral claim’, pp. 189-94; Ramsey, ‘Christian ethics’, esp. pp. 221-4.



on capital punishment during the 1950s and 1960s. Several bishops made the point in 1948 that, whatever the death penalty's effectiveness as a deterrent, to suspend or abolish it would send a hazardous message to society. Maurice Key of Truro, for example, wondered whether it would 'suggest that the responsible authority does not regard murder as quite so dreadful a crime after all'. 'It is most important', he concluded, 'to maintain in the public mind a strong sense of justice'.<sup>62</sup>

By 1965, the emphasis of episcopal argument had shifted decisively. Greer, through his experience with HM Prison Manchester – better known as 'Strangeways' – expressed concerns, later noted by other bishops, for the welfare of those both directly and indirectly affected by executions. He had been told by prison governors of the 'electric shock' which ran through the whole prison when these took place. It was an atmosphere harmful to prisoners, the officers, and the churchmen involved. 'I have known two chaplains', he informed the peers, 'who have suffered nervous breakdowns, due entirely to their having to attend at a hanging'.<sup>63</sup>

Other bishops expressed broader concern still for the effect of executions on public attitudes and conduct. Mortimer attributed his conversion to abolitionism in part to the 'morbid and unhappy excitement' which reports of hangings produced in the public. 'The atmosphere', he suggested, 'is reminiscent of that which presumably obtained among a Roman mob seated in the Coliseum [sic] watching the gladiators fight for their lives'.<sup>64</sup> Ellison noted 'the harm done generally to society by the morbid interest taken in the contemplation of a human being fighting for his life and in the ghastly details of how he is to be deprived of it if he is found guilty'.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> *HL Deb.* 155, c. 482, 28 Apr. 1948.

<sup>63</sup> *HL Deb.* 198, c. 715, 10 Jul. 1956.

<sup>64</sup> *HL Deb.* 198, c. 630, 9 Jul. 1956.

<sup>65</sup> *HL Deb.* 268, cc. 609-10, 20 Jul. 1965. For more on the shift in opinion among the Anglican episcopate, compare McLeod 'God and the gallows', pp. 330-56; Neville Twitchell, *The politics of*

The arguments of the Lords Spiritual tended in a causalist direction, though their focus varied by issue. In debating the legalisation of homosexuality, for example, the bishops were unconcerned by the individual's right to the expression of their sexuality. Much greater emphasis was placed on the welfare of associated individuals and society more generally.

The parliamentary bishops assumed a role in a broader ecclesiastical agenda to encourage and facilitate the reconciling of fundamental Christian ethics with the ascertainable sociological, medical and legal facts. The change in the character of the bishops' conduct could be considered a form of secularisation – direct recourse to scriptural directives was replaced by a more utilitarian concern for the promotion of 'welfare', so far as it was ascertainable. Yet this was necessary if the influence of the Christian conscience over legislation and political was to be preserved.

The bishops' role in this respect extended far beyond the bounds of moral governance. It found expression too in debates on matters of industrial, commercial and economic relations and management. The bishops' involvement in these debates comprised fewer than one in ten of episcopal contributions to economic matters in the ten parliamentary sessions to 1957. In contrast, in the ten following sessions, they constituted nearly one-third. There was a similar increase in contributions to related considerations of city and community planning. They accounted for only seven *per cent* of episcopal contributions to 1957; their relative prominence effectively doubled during the following ten years.

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*the rope: the campaign to abolish capital punishment in Britain 1955-1969* (Bury St. Edmunds, 2012), ch. 7; Harry Potter, *Hanging in judgement: religion and the death penalty in England from the bloody code to abolition* (London, 1993), esp. chs. 15 and 17.

It is tempting to link such changes to the increasing diversity of the Lords Spiritual who participated in the House. After all, a tendency already existed for less senior bishops to contribute to debates on the grounds of the economic and social interests of their dioceses.<sup>66</sup> This remained evident in, for example, Leslie Hunter of Sheffield's contributions to industrial and economic issues. His justification – 'if I need one' – for intervening on the debates about an issue as technical as the Clean Air Bill of 1956, was that he had 'lived and worked all my life in industrial communities'.<sup>67</sup>

Nevertheless, the increasing number of contributions to these matters was plainly linked to the bishops' growing concern to ensure that Christian values continued to permeate society. The concern in this case centred around the great upheavals and relocation of populations after the war, and the headlong pursuit of ever increasing prosperity by successive British governments. It was again suggestive of a society which was rapidly becoming alienated – in this case, physically, in terms of its patterns of settlement and work – from the Christian institutions and values which had previously been considered crucial in the development of communal identities and harmonious community relations.

The parliamentary bishops had, of course, a strong historical record of intervening on questions of the nation's housing stock and community planning, mostly thanks to Garbett. However, from the late 1960s their concern began to focus less on the moral degradation associated with social deprivation, than on the promotion of community cohesion. Greer articulated this point, noting in a debate on urban renewal that 'we need not only to provide houses for people, with proper

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<sup>66</sup> See, for example, Hensley Henson, *Retrospect of an unimportant life*, 3 vols. (London, 1943), II, p. 83.

<sup>67</sup> *HL Deb.* 235, c. 670, 15 Nov. 1961.

sanitary arrangements, but also ... to provide a sense of community when we rebuild'. The eruption of high-rise flats and the translation of settled communities into them had isolated many and bred suspicion among the residents. It had resulted in 'a kind of mental restlessness which is good neither for the people themselves nor for the community generally'.<sup>68</sup> Stopford of London too spoke in 1962 of the 'real disaster' that 'any sense of a local loyalty or local sense of community' was being lost. Communities failed, and human desires and needs went unfulfilled, when 'the continuity of history' was sacrificed 'to the claims of an immediate and perhaps transient development'.<sup>69</sup>

Jones of St. Albans assumed a particularly prominent position on these issues in the mid-1960s. A local interest in this case was evident: four of the proposed second generation 'New Towns' fell within Jones' diocese. He pressed in particular for consideration of the means by which home ownership could be encouraged and facilitated, thinking this would 'deepen people's roots' and give them a stake in these New Towns.<sup>70</sup>

Underpinning such contributions was the sense that British society had become in some way rudderless. Demographic, political, and economic upheavals had dislocated the nation from the traditional sources, spiritual as much as physical, of its cohesion. The sense of a society which had lost touch with its values ran through many of the episcopal contributions on economic management and development. The bishops expressed their concerns that the politicians could not see beyond the horizon of economic prosperity. The pursuit of affluence for its own sake

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<sup>68</sup> *HL Deb.* 256, c. 154, 4 Mar. 1964.

<sup>69</sup> *HL Deb.* 244, c. 1258, 28 Nov. 1962.

<sup>70</sup> *HL Deb.* 255, c. 711, 13 Feb. 1964.

rendered human beings as impersonal units in a sprawling industrial and technocratic system, in effect denying the intrinsic spiritual value of the individual.

Hunter was particularly blunt in his condemnation of the lack of a clear vision of the kind of society post-war policy-makers sought to create. In a 1961 debate on the promotion of co-operation in industry, he lamented that there was

no generally held conviction of the principles on which it must rest or of the moral and spiritual resources on which it must draw in order to keep the whole body healthy, co-ordinated and running smoothly in top gear.<sup>71</sup>

Similarly, in a debate in 1963 on Industrial Training, Stopford pressed the government to conceive of the individual as a human, not merely as an economic machine.<sup>72</sup> Two years later, Falkner Allison of Winchester stressed the protection of the individual against the homogenising and disempowering tendencies of the advancing consumer society.<sup>73</sup>

The application of the language of the ‘individual’ was telling. It was, of course, something Garbett had often invoked in attacking the subjection of a nation’s population to the needs of the state under totalitarian regimes. It was not a coincidence that similar language was applied in the post-war era. The continuing expansion of the state, the increasingly technocratic approach to government, and relentless technological progress threatened, as totalitarianism had, to undermine the recognition of the inherent spiritual value of the individual.

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<sup>71</sup> *HL Deb.* 232, c. 213, 14 Jun. 1961.

<sup>72</sup> *HL Deb.* 246, cc. 816-20, 11 Feb. 1963.

<sup>73</sup> *HL Deb.* 264, cc. 661-5, 24 Mar. 1965.

Hunter placed particularly strong emphasis on these points. An educational system which made a 'king of the technician' undermined the moral and spiritual culture of the nation.

[W]hat in 30 years' time will be the standard of political intelligence and culture, and what about the care of the things of the spirit, which we all value? For these are things which a totalitarian State may be able to dispense with, but which a free democracy cannot dispense with.<sup>74</sup>

The nature of social and economic change could not be denied, and nor should it be resisted. However, he believed it had to be influenced by the essential Christian value of intrinsic human worth. 'I do not believe', he continued, 'that we shall lose our cultural heritage while the Church continues to exercise a civilising influence in society'. It was the role of the Church – episcopate, clergy and laity – 'to penetrate and enrich' national life with 'those truths and values which refresh and exalt the life of man in every age, past and future'.<sup>75</sup>

Hunter was more direct and articulate than most. However, as the 1960s proceeded others came to place emphasis on the importance of Christian values in the creation of a society which was not only prosperous, but harmonious and unified. In debates on housing and New Towns, the bishops cast the Christian churches as agents of reconciliation, binding together new communities which lacked pre-existing economic, social, or political identities. They stressed the community-building work undertaken by religious organisations of their own accord, and made a plea for the state to support and promote these efforts.

Jones proudly informed the House in 1964 that such was the significance that the Church afforded to the creation of community identities, that the administration

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<sup>74</sup> *HL Deb.* 235, c. 673, 15 Nov. 1961.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, c. 674. See also Hunter's comments, *HL Deb.* 232, cc. 211-16, 14 Jun. 1961.

of his own diocese had been reorganised in an effort to bind together otherwise unrelated neighbourhoods ‘ecclesiastically as one unit’. The state, he continued, should support such efforts, placing common Christian concerns at the heart of communities, enabling people to recognise their shared values and interest, and facilitating ‘an unfreezing and a mixing of people’. He pressed for New Town authorities to support these activities by loosening building restrictions for churches and church halls.<sup>76</sup>

Although the established Church was perhaps particularly well placed to undertake such a role, the claim was not made that it alone was the only possible agent of community cohesion. Rather, the rich diversity of Christian life in Britain was held as an object lesson, not only in essential shared values but in the conciliation and compromise necessary in forming communities. Greer argued that ‘one of the most effective instruments for creating a community in an area can be the Christian church’. Accordingly, in the formulation of national and local plans for new urban communities, it was imperative that ‘the churches ... be carefully consulted’.<sup>77</sup>

During previous decades, essentially only the Archbishop of Canterbury had assumed the ability to speak on behalf of Christian denominations – or, at the very least, for their leaders. When other bishops had spoken for the churches, they had only done so when specifically mandated through their involvement on cross-church committees. However, the bishops’ growing proclivity to speak in terms of ‘the churches’ from the late 1950s was not the result of such delegation. The imperative to instil Christian values into a society which they perceived as ‘secular’ required the

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<sup>76</sup> *HL Deb.* 255, cc. 708-11, 13 Feb. 1964.

<sup>77</sup> *HL Deb.* 256, c. 155, 4 Mar. 1964.

championing, not only of the established Church, but of all churches. The parliamentary bishops had assumed a more generically 'Christian' identity.

This was not only evident in their contributions to social issues, but also prominently in matters of the nation's foreign relations. The changing international context of the Church had a profound effect on the identity and conduct of the Lords Spiritual. They came to present themselves less in terms of their domestic or ecclesiastical roles, than as constituents of a broader, global Christian church. They used their presence in the House to ensure that the fundamental Christian principles which had facilitated reconciliation and communion between Anglicans and Christians abroad influenced and informed the government's conduct of the nation's international relations.

The relative importance of episcopal contributions to foreign and colonial affairs actually declined slightly between the 1950s and 1960s. While in the ten sessions to 1957 these matters accounted for nearly one-third of all episcopal contributions, in the following ten years their relative prominence halved. Such a decline is in some ways counter-intuitive. While in the 1950s, conflicts in Kenya and Cyprus, the reorganisation of Britain's African colonies and, most of all, the Suez crisis drew the bishops to the House, the foreign policy challenges of the 1960s were of a different order of magnitude. Decolonisation gathered apace, accelerating after 1957 and during the mid-1960s, an arms embargo against South Africa was established in 1964, while crises erupted in Southern Rhodesia and Nyasaland, and renewed attention accrued to the plight of refugees. In terms of absolute number of contributions however, there was no remarkable decline.<sup>78</sup> Foreign and colonial

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<sup>78</sup> From 1948 to 1957, the bishops made 82 contributions to debates on foreign affairs; from 1958 to 1967 they made 73.



affairs simply diminished in prominence as a result of the general broadening of the bishops' participation in debates on other subjects.

What is striking about episcopal interventions in overseas affairs was not this relative stagnation in total number of episcopal contributions, but the growth in the number of bishops engaging. As has been explained in earlier chapters, the Archbishop of Canterbury had traditionally assumed a pre-eminence in these matters. From 1950 to the end of his archiepiscopate, Fisher was responsible for one in four contributions to foreign affairs. Yet over the first ten years of his primacy, Ramsey accounted for barely one in ten. Conversely, twenty-one other bishops contributed to at least one debate on foreign affairs from 1958 to 1967. Less than half this number had contributed in the preceding ten sessions. Even bishops like Wilson, whose interests according to one obituary were 'exclusively with the diocese', made significant contributions, notably on the role of the United Nations.<sup>79</sup>

That the Anglican episcopate came increasingly to understand their parliamentary role in a broader, international context was closely associated with the 'globalisation' of the Anglican Church itself.<sup>80</sup> During the 1950s and 1960s, Anglican dioceses in the Indian Ocean region and in Africa which had been under the direct authority of the Archbishop of Canterbury were grouped together as ecclesiastical provinces, and granted autonomy as independent churches. They retained a sentimental allegiance to the Anglican base in England, but in most spiritual and ecclesiastical senses they were self-governing. The Anglican Church

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<sup>79</sup> *Daily Telegraph*, 2 Mar. 2002; *HL Deb.* 246, cc. 1381-6, 20 Feb. 1963; *HL Deb.* 259, cc. 223-31, 24 Jun. 1964. Wilson became chairman of the BSR's International and Economic Affairs Committee – known after 1970 as the Committee for International Affairs and Migration – in 1969.

<sup>80</sup> Matthew Grimley, 'The fall and rise of Church and state? Religious history, politics and the state in Britain, 1961-2011', *Studies in church history* 49 (2013), p. 493.

was transformed into what Fisher once called ‘a sort of Commonwealth of churches’.<sup>81</sup>

It is perhaps paradoxical that, as formal authority was replaced by ties of sentiment, the self-identification of the English bishops increasingly incorporated a global dimension. Culturally however, the expansion of the Communion was hugely significant. Emphasis was placed on the value of diverse insights into the Christian conscience; through the strengthening of bonds of fellowship, understanding and compromise, the Church’s spiritual mission would be better realised.

Collective sentiments were engendered and the Communion given meaningful coherence through periodic voluntary gatherings and the work of continuing institutions. From the inception of his archiepiscopate, Fisher devoted much attention to the expansion and strengthening of the Communion, travelling widely and devoting much energy to the creation of the organisational infrastructure necessary to facilitate collective action.<sup>82</sup> Most notable was his reinvigoration of the Lambeth Conferences. Held decennially since 1867,<sup>83</sup> these meetings of global Anglican bishops had languished in the inter-war period. So haughtily treated were the overseas delegates, and so divided had the meetings become – over ecumenism, church order, and particularly the creation of the ecumenical Church of South India – that many American and Canadian representatives at the 1930 conference vowed never to return.<sup>84</sup> Fisher determined to revive the Conferences as ‘the great family gathering of the Anglican Communion’.<sup>85</sup> Among his first acts as archbishop was a

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<sup>81</sup> Edward Carpenter, *Archbishop Fisher: his life and times* (Norwich, 1991), p. 463.

<sup>82</sup> Andrew Chandler and David Hein, *Archbishop Fisher: Church, state and world* (Farnham, 2012), ch. 5; Hein, *Geoffrey Fisher*, xiii; Carpenter, *Cantuar*, pp. 498-500.

<sup>83</sup> Save for periods disrupted by war. No Conferences were held between 1908 and 1920, or between 1930 and 1948.

<sup>84</sup> Carpenter, *Cantuar*, p. 497; Chandler and Hein, *Fisher*, pp. 77-91; Purcell, *Fisher*, p. 176.

<sup>85</sup> Quoted in Purcell, *Fisher*, p. 174.

tour of Canada and the USA, a sure signal of his intent to repair strained relationships. At the 1948 Conference, bishops were treated to audiences with King George VI, they lunched at the Mansion House with the Lord Mayor of London, and enjoyed entertainment in the evenings courtesy of the Church Missionary Society. The Conference agenda was weighty, but emphasised the common ties of history, churchmanship, belief and worship among the members of the Communion. Fisher's genial chairmanship, with its focus on compromise and understanding, fostered a spirit of fellowship. Such was the success of the Conference that the *Official Year Book of the Church of England* issued in 1949 noted, a touch optimistically though not without cause, that

[m]any Bishops attending the Conference felt that they had rediscovered how much they shared in common and how great was their unity of mind and spirit ... The Bishops went away immensely encouraged and feeling they were backed by world-wide prayer and understanding.<sup>86</sup>

The work of the Conferences was augmented by the creation of continuing institutions which gave structure, continuity, and cohesion to the Communion, notably the Anglican Advisory Council for Missionary Strategy and the Anglican Congress.

Such initiatives increased the bishops' sense of their place within a global Christian order, and the responsibilities which came along with it. The Communion provided a working proof of the capacity of basic Christian values to overcome cultural differences and to promote understanding, accommodation, compromise and reconciliation. These were values of particular significance to the conduct of the state's foreign and colonial affairs in the post-war period. In an era of decolonisation

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<sup>86</sup> Carpenter, *Archbishop Fisher*, p. 458.

and the rebalancing of world power, the preservation of British influence depended increasingly on the nation's capacity to co-ordinate with its allies in the expanding Commonwealth and beyond.<sup>87</sup> In the House of Lords, the bishops sought to apply the insights of Christian conscience, and practical lessons of the reinvigorated Communion, to the state's work.

This was particularly obvious in their interventions in matters of decolonisation. As imperial governance retreated, the bishops sought to ensure that the recognition of the freedom of religion was instilled in constitutions of newly independent nations. Malta was a case in point. The significant political influence of the Catholic Church on the island had long resulted in discrimination against the island's protestant churches.<sup>88</sup> Colonial authorities had pragmatically looked the other way as mixed marriages between Catholics and protestants were effectively banned, and protestant clerics were unable to wear ceremonial robes in public. In discussing the island's independence constitution, the parliamentary bishops assumed a role on the behalf of, and in co-ordination with, other British protestant churches,<sup>89</sup> to ensure that their co-religionists would be able to practise their beliefs freely.<sup>90</sup> Having failed to secure adequate assurances from the government in private

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<sup>87</sup> The Church's role in these processes has only recently been considered in its own right. See John Fisher, 'The Church of England and British policy towards the Assyrians, 1914-1955', in Keith Robbins and John Fisher (eds.), *Religion and diplomacy: religion and British foreign policy, 1815 to 1941* (Dordrecht, 2010), pp. 225-50; Laura Robson, 'Church, state, and the Holy Land: British protestant approaches to imperial policy in Palestine, 1917-1948', *Journal of imperial and commonwealth history* 39 (2011), pp. 457-77; Sarah Stockwell, "'Splendidly leading the way"? Archbishop Fisher and decolonisation in British colonial Africa', *Journal of imperial and commonwealth history* 36 (2008), 545-64; Sarah Stockwell, "'Improper and even unconstitutional": the involvement of the Church of England in the politics of the end of empire in Cyprus', in Melanie Barber, Stephen Taylor and Gabriel Sewell (eds.), *From the Reformation to the permissive society: a miscellany*, Church of England Record Society 18 (Woodbridge, 2010), pp. 583-655.

<sup>88</sup> See also debates on Federation of Malaysia. *HL Deb.* 252, cc. 932-79, 26 Jul. 1963.

<sup>89</sup> To a lesser extent, the Greek Orthodox Church as well.

<sup>90</sup> BCC resolution, 11 Feb. 1958, CFR RC 200/2/108/10-24; Beloe to Eley, 21 Mar. 1961, CFR/RC/201/19; Beloe memo, 14 Apr. 1961, CFR/RC/201/22-3; Ramsey to Moderator of the Church of Scotland, President of the Baptist Union of Great Britain and Ireland, Chairman of the Congregational Union of England and Wales, President of the Methodist Conference, Moderator of

discussions, the bishops used their membership of the House essentially to embarrass the government into ensuring freedom of religion.

The most influential episcopal interventions were made by Ellison, who had secured the authority to speak on behalf of the British Council of Churches on the subject of Malta.<sup>91</sup> As the island's constitution was rushed through parliament in July 1964, he drew attention to the undermining of religious safeguards in successive iterations of the document. What parliament had been asked to approve, he declared to the peers, omitted safeguards against discrimination on the grounds of religious belief, and excluded matrimonial and 'personal' law from the constitutional prohibition on prejudicial legislation.<sup>92</sup> Ellison's observations caused a great deal of consternation for the government. Fearing the timetable for the passage of the legislation would be derailed, having undertaken to pass the bill in a single day, the government minister addressed the bishop's concerns as a priority. By the following day, the House was informed that the Colonial Secretary had contacted the Maltese premier and had been assured that the issue would be addressed as a matter of urgency.<sup>93</sup>

The bishops' involvement in the process of decolonisation suggested the extent to which the Church's global responsibilities and the state's international interests overlapped. The attainment of the nation's international goals increasingly relied not on the authority of empire, but on policymakers' ability to exert influence through voluntary international associations, such as the Commonwealth and the

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the Presbyterian Church of England, Slack, Eley, and the bishop of Gibraltar, Slack, and Allison, 10 Oct. 1961, CFR/RC/201/78-9.

<sup>91</sup> Beloe to Ellison, 28 Jul. 1964, EP 0/3/6/35.

<sup>92</sup> Matrimonial and 'personal' legislation included matters relating to adoption, marriage, divorce, burial, devolution of property on death or other matters of 'personal law'. See *HL Deb.* 260, c. 1016, 28 Jul. 1964.

<sup>93</sup> *HL Deb.* 260, cc. 1120-1, 29 Jul. 1964.

NATO military alliance. Church leaders not only possessed significant experience in constructing such relationships, but had entered into close ecumenical partnerships with churches in allied nations. The bishops imagined an essential symmetry between the spiritual imperative to seek communion, and the state's growing reliance on voluntary international partnership.

In a debate of 1965, Ramsey noted poignantly the structural and ideological analogies between the British Commonwealth and the Anglican Communion.

Indeed, the vitality of the Communion had helped to solidify the Commonwealth

by the constant coming and going of people engaged in educational work, in medical work, in the arts, in the cure of souls, and in the striving to build up a partnership between the races.<sup>94</sup>

Given that the development of the Communion had occurred before the expansion of the Commonwealth, the parliamentary bishops assumed a role in promoting, advising on, and safeguarding the fundamentally Christian principles on which co-operation and reconciliation were based.

Fisher, so closely involved in the revival and expansion of the Communion, expressed these ideas most clearly. It was particularly apparent in his contributions on the Suez Crisis, which, more than any other comparable episode, exposed the nation's reliance on its allies and international networks. The government's actions had precipitated division in the nation and among Christians, within the Commonwealth and the Communion, and between Britain's international partners. Fisher's role, as he perceived it, was to promote and facilitate reconciliation at all these levels through his championing of the basic Christian principles to which they all adhered. He declared that it was 'demanded of me and my office' that he

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<sup>94</sup> *HL Deb.* 265, cc. 929-48, 5 May 1965.

intervene to isolate and express a ‘Christian judgement’ upon the matter. The nation had, he reminded the peers, pledged its ‘word and honour’ to the UN Charter. They had invested themselves in, and committed themselves to, the resolution of disputes by collective mediation. He was sceptical of the claims of the hapless Lord Chancellor, Viscount Kilmuir, that British and French forces had intervened as a ‘fire engine’ to separate Israeli and Egyptian forces. He interrupted a Kilmuir speech in the House six times, seeking to establish the government’s view of which nation(s) had acted aggressively – implicitly, he was suggesting that Britain could be perceived as an aggressor, contrary to its international commitments.<sup>95</sup>

According to one of Fisher’s biographers, it was ‘one of the fiercest attacks on a minister of the Crown ever made in the House of Lords by an Archbishop of Canterbury’.<sup>96</sup> It provoked bitter correspondence with besieged government ministers who insisted that the primate had overstepped his authority. Particularly insistent was the First Lord of the Admiralty, Viscount Hailsham, who – despite having more pressing concerns – embarked on a lengthy and scathing correspondence.<sup>97</sup> Hailsham’s implicit assumption was that at times of disunity – not only within the Church, but the nation as well – the archbishop should use his platform cautiously. He ought to retain a diplomatic silence – as Lang and Davidson

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<sup>95</sup> *HL Deb.* 199, cc. 1293-7, 1 Nov. 1956.

<sup>96</sup> Carpenter, *Archbishop Fisher*, p. 404. See also John Philip Anderson, “‘On very slippery ground’: the British churches, Archbishop Fisher and the Suez crisis”, *Contemporary British history* 29 (2015), pp. 342-58; Chandler and Hein, *Fisher*, pp. 130-3, 205-12; Purcell, *Fisher*, pp. 260-4.

<sup>97</sup> Although Hailsham was an active churchman, it seems he came to have little respect for the parliamentary bishops. In 1986, when he was Lord Chancellor, he confessed that when he was bored on the Woolsack ‘I amuse myself by saying bollocks, *sotto voce*, to the bishops’. To what extent this attitude was formed by his clash with Fisher in 1956 is hard to say. Quoted in Frank Pakenham (Earl of Longford), *The bishops: a study of leaders in the Church today* (London, 1986), pp. 10-11.

might have done – until such time as the facts of the matter had been fully revealed and the archbishop could help reunite divided counsels.<sup>98</sup>

Fisher conceived of his responsibilities differently. He had to promote unity, but his view went beyond the government's political agenda. His responsibility was to consider and promote the interests common to

the whole nation, to foreign Churches with which I am in constant touch, to the Commonwealth and its Churches where I have many personal and official links, to U.S.A. and its Churches with which I am in close touch.<sup>99</sup>

His basic responsibility was to apply his own assessment of Christian values to parliamentary issues, helping to bring 'into one single obedience' secular and spiritual imperatives. In this 'baffling task', sincere Christians 'must constantly differ' – '[t]hat is obvious'.<sup>100</sup> Through his intervention in the debate, he wrote, he had only sought to isolate those points on which Christians should reflect in forming an opinion on the issue.<sup>101</sup>

Fisher had been pre-eminent in these issues, seeking to promote the values which permeated the Communion. His successor, Michael Ramsey, assumed a similar, if more temperate, role, notably towards the Rhodesian government's racist policies and its 1965 Unilateral Declaration of Independence (UDI). He argued that Britain's international moral influence depended on its reputation as a consistent, principled, and trustworthy actor: the nation 'should be seen to uphold law, order and justice with the same resolution everywhere, whatever be the race and colour of those in relation to whom law has to be upheld'. The question of the economic

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<sup>98</sup> See, for example, Hailsham to Fisher, 8 Nov. 1956, FP 171/294-6; Hailsham to Fisher, 15 Nov. 1956, FP 171/319-20. For divisions within the Church, and between the churches, see Anderson, 'On very slippery ground', pp. 348-50.

<sup>99</sup> Fisher to Hailsham, 6 Nov. 1956, FP 171/284.

<sup>100</sup> Fisher to Hailsham, 13 Nov. 1956, FP 171/309-14.

<sup>101</sup> Fisher to Hailsham, 6 Nov. 1956, FP 171/284; Fisher to Campbell, 7 Nov. 1956, FP 171/292.



effectiveness of sanctions in bringing the Rhodesian government to heel was secondary in importance to demonstrating the nation's commitment to upholding standards of conduct in its remaining colonies, the Commonwealth and in international relations. 'There are at stake', he declared to the peers, 'not only the future of Rhodesia and the future of much else besides, but also the honour of this country'.<sup>102</sup>

Although Fisher and Ramsey were prominent in these instances, the use of the House to promote Christian understandings of international relations was by no means their sole preserve – not least as the archbishop's parliamentary pre-eminence declined over the course of Ramsey's primacy. Various bishops intervened in debate to emphasise the Church's Christian responsibility to act as an agent of reconciliation. Although the competing responsibilities invoked by the situation in Rhodesia had split the bench, Allison was clear about the bishops' responsibility.

[T]he primary task of the Church *qua* Church remains unchanged – namely, to fulfil this ministry of reconciliation in Rhodesia and indeed throughout Africa, come what may.<sup>103</sup>

For Ramsey, there was great importance in signalling to Rhodesia's divided and confused churches, the agents of accord, that they were supported by the moral resolution of the British people and parliament. Stockwood, notably less damning in his assessment of the Smith regime, warned against action which might further alienate and divide white and black Rhodesians. Parliament should seek to 'reconcile those who are estranged and prevent further estrangement'. He went so far as to propose a linguistic adjustment, suggesting that the peers use the Christian names of

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<sup>102</sup> *HL Deb.* 270, c. 268, 15 Nov. 1965. See also, *HL Deb.* 278, cc. 1254-8, 8 Dec. 1966.

<sup>103</sup> *HL Deb.* 270, c. 324, 15 Nov. 1965.

the antagonists so that they might retain a sense of the ‘family’ that had been split by UDI.<sup>104</sup>

The bishops’ emphasis on reconciliation was particularly pointed during the debates on the Rhodesian crisis. The 1968 Southern Rhodesia (UN sanctions) Order had proven highly politically divisive, provoking a bitter clash between the parties and leading to the rejection of the proposal by Conservative peers and the subsequent breakdown of cross-party discussions on Lords reform. More generally however, it was not simply a Christian view of the importance of reconciliation that the bishops championed, but also the practical value of ecclesiastical experience in bridging international divisions.

By the 1960s, the Church had experienced substantial success in bringing together the diverse churches of the Communion, of maintaining and deepening the partnership between diverse communities based on a set of shared principles and beliefs. For Ellison, the usefulness and, indeed, the very existence of the Commonwealth rested upon ‘a spirit of mutual dependence’ and the willingness of their people to act in the common interest. In July 1964 during a debate on the recent meeting of Commonwealth prime ministers, he told the peers that the churches had accepted this responsibility, and to support his claim produced a ‘long list’ of projects undertaken by Commonwealth churches to ‘help in education, rural reconstruction, irrigation, training in nutrition, and so on’.<sup>105</sup> He pressed the government to support and encourage similar efforts to bind the Commonwealth together.

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<sup>104</sup> Ibid, cc. 353-6.

<sup>105</sup> *HL Deb.* 260, c. 1127, 29 Jul. 1964.

A month earlier, Wilson had spoken of the important role of non-governmental organisations in achieving the goals of the UN Development Decade, reducing the disparities of wealth, and promoting partnership, between nations. The organisation of such projects had become ‘incorporated into the normal life of the Christian community’. He placed particular emphasis on the coordination of Christian groups and initiatives through the World Council of Churches, enabling schemes ‘quite beyond the resources of any national Christian group’.<sup>106</sup>

George Medhurst and Kenneth Moyser commented in 1988 that

[i]n the absence of a coherent political theology, Church involvement in the political domain moves forward as the result of frequently uncoordinated initiatives rather than as the product of clear strategies.<sup>107</sup>

From at least 1958, this was not true of the Lords Spiritual. The Church’s approach to participation in parliament was directed by a clear agenda. Acceptance of the ‘secular society’, the advent of technocratic forms of governance, and the growth of consumerist culture necessitated a strong Christian influence to be exerted on national debate; it was in the House of Lords that this was achieved.

The bishops’ contributions continued to reflect a peculiar Anglican experience, but they were no longer limited to the geographical horizons of the English dioceses. They sought a role in the House as the advocates of a set of essentially ‘Christian’ ethical values. In this sense their role was ‘national’, in that these were values held to be universal, applicable to the governance of all the countries of the United Kingdom. Yet they were also ‘global’. The bishops offered a

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<sup>106</sup> *HL Deb.* 259, cc. 225-7, 24 Jun. 1964.

<sup>107</sup> Kenneth Medhurst and George Moyser, *Church and politics in a secular age* (Oxford, 1988), p. 271.

model of international relations which they suppose would best serve the ‘national’ and ‘spiritual’ imperatives of reconciliation and communion.

The Lords Spiritual were clearly concerned to engage with crucial political issues, to relate to the House in the terms of the debate. Yet they remained outside of the party-political dynamics. It was suggestive of a new formulation of the establishment in which the value the Church could bring to national debate derived not from its status as a part of the state, but in being apart from it. The influences brought to bear by the Lords Spiritual were based in experiences and views alien to the ‘secular society’, and yet they were believed to be vital to the conduct of the state.

It was notable that while earlier generations of bishops had been eager to participate in parliamentary committees, by the late 1950s Church leaders cautioned against such entanglements. At a meeting in October 1958, Fisher warned the bishops that involvement in such investigations ran the risk of suggesting that they represented some ‘vested interest’. Equally concerning, episcopal participation in parliamentary and governmental commissions might be taken to imply that the Church was supportive of, and therefore tied to, the reports which resulted.<sup>108</sup> The bishops’ role in the House was to not to be the advocates for any specific agenda or programme, be it political or otherwise. They were to enhance the work of parliament through the application of their Christian witness, investing the ‘secular society’ with essential spiritual values.

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<sup>108</sup> Bishops’ Meeting, 14-15 Oct. 1958, BM 14/228-9.

## 7. The ‘secular society’ and the Church’s place in national debate

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In the immediate post-war period, many ecclesiastical leaders proclaimed their confidence in the Church’s prospects for the years ahead. If they were complacent, it was not perhaps without reason. For all the decade’s technological and social advancement, the 1950s retained and reasserted a conservative sense of respectable religiosity. Grace Davie and Adrian Hastings have perhaps best described the ‘general feeling of religious revival’ which pervaded the country during the ‘Anglican decade’.<sup>1</sup> National culture, identity and elite institutions remained avowedly Christian in character.<sup>2</sup> British Christianity seemed in robust health – according to one historian, experiencing its greatest rates of growth since the eighteenth century.<sup>3</sup> Sporadic outbursts of concentrated popular religiosity, as manifested in the Billy Graham Crusades, at the very least suggested the continuing potency of religious calls. The issue of disestablishment remained dormant. Even Garbett, the most persistent proponent of reform in the Church-state relationship, went only so far as to affirm the principles of the 1935 archbishops’ commission on Church and State.<sup>4</sup>

Yet it was the perception within the Church of the declining national role of Christianity, regardless of the actual facts of religious adherence, which proved crucial in determining the Church’s later approach to institutional politics and the

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<sup>1</sup> Grace Davie, *Religion in Britain since 1945* (Oxford, 1994), pp. 30-33; Adrian Hastings, *A history of English Christianity 1920-2000* (London, 2001), p. 444.

<sup>2</sup> Sam Brewitt-Taylor, ‘The invention of a “secular society”? Christianity and the sudden appearance of secularization discourses in the British national media, 1961-4’, *Twentieth-century British history* 24 (2013), esp. pp. 331-5; Matthew Grimley, ‘The religion of Englishness: puritanism, providentialism, and “national character,” 1918-1945’, *Journal of British studies* 46 (2007), pp. 884-906.

<sup>3</sup> Callum Brown, *The death of Christian Britain: understanding secularisation, 1800-2000* (Abingdon, 2009), pp. 5-7, 170-5; E.R. Norman, *Church and society in England, 1770-1970: a historical study* (Oxford, 1976), ch. 9.

<sup>4</sup> Cyril Garbett, *Church and state in England* (London, 1950), pp. 201-4; Norman, *Church and society*, pp. 399-400.

role of the Lords Spiritual.<sup>5</sup> Particularly important were churchmen from the diocese of Sheffield – in particular its bishop, Leslie Hunter, and his chaplain, Edward ‘Ted’ Wickham – who both attained places of influence in the internal ecclesiastical debate on the nature of, and the Church’s response to, ‘secularisation’. If the Church was to recover its influence in society, they reasoned, it needed to acknowledge and relate to society as it was, rather than what churchmen assumed or hoped it to be. It needed to engage actively with contemporary patterns of thought, applying spiritual insight as a complement to other, ‘secular’ forms of expertise – academic, legal, medical, scientific.

In achieving this, the bishops’ place in parliament was of particular significance. Through the Lords Spiritual, the Church could directly exert an influence on national debate and political discourse. Hunter attempted this through his own conduct in the House, bringing his independent Christian ethical insight to bear on highly technical industrial matters. More importantly, he sought, with Wickham and others, to encourage the other parliamentary bishops to act in this way, chiefly through influencing the direction and character of ecclesiastical reform. In a sense, Hunter’s approach to the House was styled as a template for the future conduct of the Lords Spiritual.

If the welter of reports and committees on the question of the Church’s popular appeal throughout the twentieth century suggested anything, it was that certain ecclesiastical figures had been perennially concerned about the Church’s apparent decline. However, such fears were perhaps more potent in the post-war period, particularly from the late 1950s. It seemed reasonable to suppose that, in an

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<sup>5</sup> This much has been alluded to in Matthew Grimley, ‘Law, morality and secularisation: the Church of England and the Wolfenden report, 1954-1967’, *Journal of ecclesiastical history* 60 (2009), esp. pp. 731-2.

increasingly prosperous society, ‘traditional’ moral vices of alcohol abuse and gambling would become more widespread.<sup>6</sup> Much of Fisher’s reputation for fusty conservatism can be attributed to his invocation of such concerns in the House of Lords.<sup>7</sup>

However, the sense of crisis which so motivated figures like Hunter and Wickham was of a different order entirely. They perceived a crisis that was systemic, existential, and long-present but unacknowledged; it confronted not only the established Church of England, but all of European Christendom. Such thinking had first emerged among Christian intellectuals in the 1930s. Trends of social, industrial and political development since the industrial revolution – and, in some formulations, from the Enlightenment – were thought to have been inimical to the continued acceptance of the supernatural.

The thesis received its most influential exposition in Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s *Letters and papers from prison*, published in English in 1953. Bonhoeffer conveyed a sense of a setting age; that after nineteen hundred years of religious practice, humanity was moving into an era where supernatural belief would be deemed redundant.<sup>8</sup> The case was perhaps most succinctly expressed by Garbett in an address before the Church Congress in 1935. The exponential pace of scientific discovery had fuelled academic assaults on the veracity of Biblical teaching. Meanwhile, ‘modern pagans’, while acknowledging the benefits of civic Christian

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<sup>6</sup> G.I.T. Machin, *Churches and social issues in twentieth-century Britain* (1998, Oxford), ch. 5. See also, Hugh McLeod, *The religious crisis of the 1960s* (Oxford, 2007), pp. 102-23.

<sup>7</sup> See for example Fisher’s interventions in the House on the introduction of Premium Bonds. *HL Deb.* 196, cc. 1297-305, 26 Apr. 1956; William Purcell, *Fisher of Lambeth: a portrait from life* (London, 1969), p. 215; Andrew Chandler and David Hein, *Archbishop Fisher, 1945-1961: Church, state and world* (Farnham, 2012), pp. 123-4; Edward Carpenter, *Archbishop Fisher: his life and times* (Norwich, 1991), pp. 405-6; David Hein, *Geoffrey Fisher: Archbishop of Canterbury* (Cambridge, 2008), p. 88. See also criticisms of Fisher’s conduct in Harold Macmillan, *The Macmillan Diaries: the Cabinet years, 1950-57* (London, 2003), p. 554.

<sup>8</sup> See Brewitt-Taylor, ‘Secular society’, pp. 335-40.

ceremonial, disavowed any contemporary relevance of its teachings. Quoting Nikolai Berdyaev – Russian philosopher and ‘one of the prophets of our time’ – Garbett expressed his fears about the godless society which had emerged: ‘Man desiring no longer to be the image of God becomes the image of the machine’.<sup>9</sup>

It was the perception of such a crisis that motivated churchmen like Hunter to seek a reformulation of the way in which the Church related to national discourse. Hunter’s churchmanship had grown from his participation in the Student Christian Movement, and the inspiration he drew from the socially-engaged ministries of William Temple, Dick Sheppard and Charles Gore. His particular formulation of the ‘Christendom in crisis’ thesis was informed by his experiences as an incumbent in industrial districts – in Newcastle-upon-Tyne, Northumberland and Barking.<sup>10</sup> There he had witnessed the tyranny, ‘brutal and insistent’, of the pattern of industrial life which had reduced the population’s receptiveness to spiritual concepts.<sup>11</sup>

Industry and commerce were impersonal forces, uninterested in community and disempowering to the labourer who was forced by his low standard of living to subscribe to the ‘creed of Mammon’: ‘[t]hey feed an insatiable god who in return sends them home with the wherewithal to feed themselves’.<sup>12</sup> The men such processes were breeding were not necessarily ‘bad’ or ‘immoral’, but apathetic. They

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<sup>9</sup> Cyril Garbett, *A call to Christians: the presidential address given by the Bishop of Winchester at the Church Congress at Bournemouth on October 8<sup>th</sup> 1935* (London, 1935), pp. 74-7. See also, Leslie Hunter, *The seed and the fruit: Christian morality in a time of transition* (London, 1953), p. 100.

<sup>10</sup> Alan Webster, ‘Hunter, Leslie Stannard (1890–1983)’, ODNB; BHP, ‘Barking, 1926-1930’, BHP 3/5/5; ‘Barking’, BHP 3/5/6; ‘A lively community: Northumbria and Tyneside in the 20s and 30s’, BHP 3/6/1; Gordon Hewitt, ‘Canon of Newcastle 1922-1926’, ‘Vicar of Barking 1926-1930’, ‘Archdeacon of Northumberland 1931-1939’, in Gordon Hewitt (ed.) *Strategist for the spirit: Leslie Hunter, Bishop of Sheffield 1939-62* (Oxford, 1985); James Derick Preece, ‘Leslie Stannard Hunter (1890-1983): Bishop of Sheffield (1939-1962)’, MPhil. thesis, University of Sheffield (1986), ch. 3, esp. pp. 63-72.

<sup>11</sup> ‘Barking’, BHP 3/5/5, pp. 8-9.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid, pp. 8-9. See also ‘Industrial mission’, BHP 3/4/9; Hunter’s Bishops’ Meetings diary, 14-15 Jan. 1952, BHP 7/4/10; Bishops’ meeting, 14-15 Jan. 1952, BM 13/1-22.



saw only to the horizons of their immediate material needs, suppressed by a regime that made small demands of their higher sensibilities. ‘They are mass-producing and mass-produced’, seemingly ‘without any feeling of spiritual need’.<sup>13</sup>

To Hunter’s mind, the dehumanising effects of industry were compounded by the degrading tendencies of the expanding modern state. Administrators, he noted, were liable to become overly concerned with measurements, and thereby ‘forget that they and their machinery are means to an end’.<sup>14</sup> The combination of a spiritually apathetic society and mighty state was, he thought, ‘the dictator’s opportunity’<sup>15</sup> ‘[T]he natural tendency’, he noted in his *Diocesan Review* of 1949, ‘is towards totalitarian bureaucracy’.<sup>16</sup> As he commented in 1944,

[t]he choice in the post-war era will be between a planned society on a totalitarian basis and a planned society on a democratic basis, or if both of these fail, then “mechanised barbarism”.<sup>17</sup>

The Church’s task was clear and indispensable: not to stand opposed to the society which had emerged, but to mitigate its effects, working to protect individuals, communities, and the nation from spiritual spoliation, the abuse of power, and the degradation of civic rights and human dignity.<sup>18</sup> However, by Hunter’s estimation, the Church was intellectually and organisationally incapable of exerting such an influence; it had, in fact, ‘never been so impotent in human

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<sup>13</sup> Leslie Hunter, *Church strategy in a changing world: the Lichfield Divinity Lectures, 1949* (London, 1950), pp. 30-1.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid, p. 48.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid, p. 22.

<sup>16</sup> Leslie Hunter, *Sheffield Diocesan Review* (Jul. 1949); *Guardian*, 9 Aug. 1940; Hunter, *Church strategy*, pp. 48, 63-4; Preece, ‘Hunter’, pp. 146-8.

<sup>17</sup> Leslie Hunter, *Let us go forward. Being a charge at his primary visitation of the diocese of Sheffield in May, 1944* (London, 1944), pp. 11-12.

<sup>18</sup> Hunter, *Church strategy*, pp. 22-7, 63-4.

affairs'.<sup>19</sup> Over the course of a century or more, it had surrendered its moral authority and denied the implications of social change. At the onset of the demographic and industrial revolutions of the nineteenth century, the Church had closely identified itself with the patrician order, embedding itself in 'little bourgeois enclaves', cultivating its wilful ignorance of the realities of life for the great majority of the population.<sup>20</sup> Ecclesiastical resources had been concentrated in middle-class areas, and clerics had become overly intimate with an elite social stratum insulated from the struggles of daily life. As such, though the great expansion of population and industry had produced many patent evils, the Church had been silent, rarely on the side of workers as they struggled for secure employment, higher wages and social welfare.<sup>21</sup>

The effects of these failings had been compounded over the years; by the mid twentieth century, the situation became critical. The Church faced 'a legacy of suspicion and fear' in appealing to the working classes, who were growing in economic and political significance.<sup>22</sup> 'The British working-man', Hunter wrote in retirement, 'is no fool ... & does not forget this kind of discrimination'.<sup>23</sup> Moreover, despite the revolution in the patterns of most people's lives, the Church remained organised to minister to small parochial social and economic units; it was simply unable to relate to a society where industrial, civic and social life operated at different scales and across localities.<sup>24</sup> The failure of the eighteenth- and nineteenth-

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid, p. 13; 'Public worship and its conduct', BHP 3/6/14, pp. 19-20; Leslie Hunter, *A mission of the people of God: being a picture of an English diocese and a visitation charge in A.C. 1960* (London, 1961), esp. p. 11

<sup>20</sup> 'Reflections on episcopacy', BHP 3/6/15, p. 11.

<sup>21</sup> Hunter, *Mission*, p. 11.

<sup>22</sup> Hunter, *Church strategy*, p. 15.

<sup>23</sup> BHP 3/6/15 'Reflections on episcopacy', pp. 12-13; 'Industrial Mission', BHP 3/4/9, p. 9; 'The first 5 years', BHP 3/6/7, p. 4.

<sup>24</sup> Hunter, *Church strategy*, pp. 16-17. See also, Hunter, *Let us go forward*, ch. 3.

century Church was clear; in the mid twentieth century it faced the prospect of appealing to a stratum of society ‘that was not so much alienated from the national Church as never belonged to it’.<sup>25</sup>

Retrieving the Church’s place of intellectual, political and social influence required an urgent reorientation of its message and mission. The new civilization needed to be invested with Christian methods and objectives – that is to say, the totalitarian tendencies of modern society needed to be curtailed by fostering ‘the abiding values and beliefs of the old’.<sup>26</sup> This would not be achieved ‘by playing the old records with louder needles and more amplifiers, or by hit and run commando raids’.<sup>27</sup> The Church needed to use its continued access to the institutions of national influence – not least the House of Lords – in order to engage actively and constructively with contemporary patterns of discourse. They needed to articulate Christian teaching in terms that resonated with industrial society, to reconcile Church teaching with scientific insight and ‘offer an interpretation of life four-square to reality’.<sup>28</sup> ‘We must make the best of the society that exists’, he told his diocesan clergy in May 1944, ‘even if it does not correspond to the pastoralia text-book, or the Prayer Book or the Bible’.<sup>29</sup>

Hunter’s efforts to pursue these goals had a significant influence on the Church’s understanding of the process of secularisation. It was Hunter who was behind the appointment of Wickham to the chaplaincy of Shrewsbury Hospital, and

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<sup>25</sup> Hunter, *Mission*, p. 11; Hunter, *Let us go forward*, pp. 32-3.

<sup>26</sup> Hunter, *Mission*, appendix ‘A Civic Sermon, 29 May 1960’, p. 109; Hunter, *Church strategy*, p. 48, appendix “‘The Church and the welfare state in Britain’”, address to the summer school of Christian sociology, 1947’, pp. 91-4.

<sup>27</sup> Hunter, *Church strategy*, p. 33.

<sup>28</sup> ‘Spiritual nature of Man’, BHP 3/6/20, pp. 7-8; ‘Episcopal, 1939’, esp. ‘Worship’, ‘Evangelism’ and ‘The Method’, BHP 7/4/6; Leslie Hunter, ‘The words of God’, *Modern Churchman* 6 (1963), pp. 140-1.

<sup>29</sup> Hunter, *Let us go forward*, p. 26; Hunter, *Mission*, p. 39; Hunter, *Church strategy*, pp. 37-8.

Hunter who instructed him to devote part of his time to ministry on the shop floors of industrial works, hosting informal discussions of Christian belief and speaking to the men in their own terms.<sup>30</sup> Wickham's experiences of 'industrial chaplaincy' resulted in the publication of his landmark 1957 study of secularisation, *Church and people in an industrial city*.<sup>31</sup> In its central thesis, of the convergence of 'revolutions' in industrial society which served to marginalise the churches, it derived a great deal of inspiration from Hunter's own prescriptions.<sup>32</sup> Like Hunter, Wickham was interested in improving ecclesiastical understanding of society as it actually was, in order that an effective response might be formulated. '[O]nly by understanding the history of the patient', he wrote, 'can she be brought to health, to enliven and fructify her recalcitrant contemporary world instead of merely surviving it'.<sup>33</sup>

Though cast as a largely 'historical' study, in its mixture of sociological method and moral critique Wickham's work embodied the principles that Hunter hoped to instil in the Church. Wickham was not concerned with the Church as an amalgamation of institutions, movements and personalities abstracted from society, but rather the role of the Church *within* society.<sup>34</sup> In terms of the historical interpretations, it was a landmark text, signifying and heralding the shift of academic attention away from 'institutional' towards more 'social' histories of the Church. It is ironic then, that the principles that Wickham's text embodied would form a central

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<sup>30</sup> 'Industrial Mission', BHP 3/4/8-9, p. 11; Hunter, *Mission*, pp. 17-18; Preece, 'Hunter', pp. 158-60; *Star* (Sheffield), 31 Oct. 1961; 'Industrial Mission', BHP 3/4/8-9, *passim*.

<sup>31</sup> 'Industrial Mission', BHP 3/4/8-9, p. 1. For the influence of Wickham's work on the orthodox secularisation narrative, see Kenneth. S. Inglis, *Churches and the working classes in Victorian England* (London, 1963), esp. pp. 326-7.

<sup>32</sup> For subtle differences in the nuances of Hunter's and Wickham's interpretations of the churches' decline, see Preece, 'Hunter', pp. 159-68.

<sup>33</sup> E.R. Wickham, *Church and people in an industrial city* (London, 1957).

<sup>34</sup> Wickham defended his 'historico-sociological' analysis from those who might argue 'that sociology cannot grasp the substance of the Body of Christ'. Wickham, *Church and people*, pp. 14-15. For more useful context on Wickham, see Brewitt-Taylor, 'Secular society', pp. 337-8; Jeremy Morris, 'Secularization and religious experience: arguments in the historiography of modern British religion', *Historical journal* 55 (2012), p. 198.

argument for the revitalisation of the Church's engagement with political institutions. In the rejuvenation of its mission, the Church required a means of influencing social discourse, 'of dealing at high level with issues as they arise both for the guidance of its members and of the nation'.<sup>35</sup> This necessarily raised the significance of the Church's participation in the House of Lords. The example of the Hebrew prophets and the Gospels indicated that the work of God was not only a private endeavour, but public and political. It was incumbent on the Church to seize opportunities to discharge its duty to society, and demonstrate its social relevance, through the forums of public and political discourse.<sup>36</sup> The influence it exerted needed to be rooted in Christian insight. However, it had to be applied to 'the social reality', to conditions in the nation as best they could be understood by secular experts.<sup>37</sup> The Christian, with his knowledge of social conditions but with a view to a higher purpose, could apply 'a far-seeing approach' and 'often a true qualitative appraisal and criteria for judgement'.<sup>38</sup>

For those advocating changes in the Church's approach to social issues along these lines, the participation of the bishops in the House of Lords was of considerable significance. In a sense, the Lords Spiritual's conduct had provided clear evidence that the Church had become preoccupied with its internal life at the expense of its mission to society. As this thesis has shown, for more than two decades the majority of eligible bishops had largely valued their position in the House only so far as it had related to ecclesiastical business. Such was the malaise by the mid-1950s that Fisher had been perfectly willing to consider relinquishing the

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<sup>35</sup> Hunter, *Church strategy*, p. 85.

<sup>36</sup> 'The Christian in politics', BHP 3/5/12, p. 2.

<sup>37</sup> 'Reflections on episcopacy', BHP 3/6/15, pp. 1-16.

<sup>38</sup> 'The Christian in politics', BHP 3/5/12, p. 4.

bishops' symbolically significant role of reading prayers at the start of each sitting of the House.<sup>39</sup>

Hunter was clear that the episcopal presence in the House needed to be recovered. As parliamentary discussions of constitutional reform revived – something they are periodically prone to do – in the late 1950s, he expressed his fears that the Church risked forfeiting its place in the legislature by default. If the bishops took so little part in the business of the House, Hunter asked the assembled episcopate in July 1957, 'could they expect to retain their places in the future?' It was suggestive of the bishops' prevailing attitude towards parliament that Hunter's intervention raised little enthusiasm and the discussion petered out without resolution.<sup>40</sup>

Hunter, of course, had the opportunity to address the failings of the Lords Spiritual, as he perceived them, through his own conduct. Although *Who's Who* ranged his attendance in the House among his various 'hobbies', it was, of course, nothing quite so casual.<sup>41</sup> In the chamber he not only sought to suggest – to churchmen as much as to the peers – the value of Christian engagement in politics and society, but warned of the dangers of its loss. His regular themes were familiar to any who had read his writings: the state was travelling in a bureaucratic, technocratic, 'totalitarian' direction; the humanising spiritual influence of Christianity was vital.

Hunter welcomed the advent of the National Health Service for its promise of more equal distribution of medical provision, but cautioned against sprawling, over-

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<sup>39</sup> Fisher to Garbett, 27 Feb. 1948, FP 46/316-17. For context, see Carpenter, *Fisher*, pp. 395-8.

<sup>40</sup> Bishops' Meeting, 8-9 Jul. 1957, BM 14/143-4.

<sup>41</sup> See Giles Ecclestone, 'A bishop in Parliament', in Gordon Hewitt (ed.) *Strategist for the spirit: Leslie Hunter, Bishop of Sheffield 1939-1962* (Oxford, 1985), pp. 144-54.

powerful bureaucracies – ‘jam to the totalitarian’ – and the abandonment of the voluntary principle which valued the individual over efficiency: ‘the medical service has perhaps been too concerned with illness and not sufficiently concerned with health’.<sup>42</sup> Similarly, in 1953 he initiated a debate – ‘a rather good one it was’<sup>43</sup> – to draw attention to the effects of the state’s interventions into family life. He questioned the capacity of state social workers to rule upon notions of ‘welfare’. Such estimations had previously been made by people ‘of true Christian love and charity’. They had possessed convictions about the intrinsic value and the constitution of a ‘good life’, qualities that mundane state employees could not possess. True, the state had the resources, and the politicians the will, to improve the social welfare of the British people dramatically. However, success turned on the leavening of spiritual influence.

[W]hen good housing, good planning, wise advice and comprehensive social and medical services have done all that they can do, there remains deepset [sic] in human nature stupidity, inertia, selfishness and sheer lack of self-discipline; and with ordinary folk only a dynamic religious faith can get to grips and deal radically with all those.<sup>44</sup>

The same was true of industrial and social relations. The pursuit of affluence for its own sake risked creating a nation of ‘predatory individuals’, whose only purpose was ‘to live and work to produce more and consume more’. Hunter laid the essential contribution of the Church before the peers: their responsibility was not to hand out pious platitudes, but ‘to try to understand the whole shape and pattern of industrial life and work’ and encourage the faithful to see in their field of work ‘also

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<sup>42</sup> *HL Deb.* 143, cc. 96-100, 9 Oct. 1946; Preece, ‘Hunter’, pp. 264-7.

<sup>43</sup> *News of the World*, 12 Jul. 1953.

<sup>44</sup> *HL Deb.* 182, c. 665, 20 May 1953.

their field of Christian service'. Only in that way, he thought, could they create a harmonious society of shared convictions.<sup>45</sup>

Hunter deeply admired the example of George Bell of Chichester, and his principled, prophetic approach to the House.<sup>46</sup> However, unlike Bell, his approach was tempered by a strong sense of the practical and a close inspection of the technical. His contributions to the House were the product of the application of deeply personal Christian insight to professional experience and academic expertise. His work on the Clean Air Act of 1956 was a case in point. His diligence certainly could not be faulted; he contributed to the second reading, Committee Stage and third reading of the Act, as well as to a debate on the Air Pollution Committee's report.<sup>47</sup> The report and resultant bill were highly technical, requiring a level of specialised knowledge that, Hunter acknowledged, some peers might not think a bishop possessed. 'My excuse' for intervening, Hunter responded

is that I have lived and worked all my days in an area where the air has been unclean and polluted. I know only too well the ill effects of air pollution on man's life and work and on his physical and mental health, and something, too, about the economic cost of wasted fuel and damaged buildings.<sup>48</sup>

The moral case was clear – '[t]he business of air pollution, directly or indirectly, is the cause of many unhealthy and warped lives' – yet Hunter did not limit himself to moral generalities. He came to the House armed with statistics on the levels of pollution in Sheffield, the effect on the people and material of the city, and

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<sup>45</sup> *HL Deb.* 232, cc. 211-16, 14 Jun. 1961.

<sup>46</sup> See the work of Andrew Chandler, in particular Andrew Chandler, 'The Church of England and the obliteration bombing of Germany in the Second World War', *English historical review* 108 (1993), pp. 920-46.

<sup>47</sup> *HL Deb.* 191, cc. 124-5, 16 Feb. 1955; *HL Deb.* 196, cc. 1166-70, 24 Apr. 1956; *HL Deb.* 197, cc. 588-90, 605-7, 608, 612-14, 620, 623-4, 627, 629, 643-4, 646, 30 May 1956; *HL Deb.* 197, c. 1224, 21 Jun. 1956.

<sup>48</sup> *HL Deb.* 196, cc. 1166-70, 24 Apr. 1956.



the specific deficiencies of individual clauses. He laid out a clear vision of a rewritten bill, one more tightly defined and severe, which addressed a broader range of emitters and which demanded greater resources from central government.<sup>49</sup>

Having consulted with, and obtained the support of, authorities at the University of Sheffield, he tabled five amendments to the bill, most designed to close loopholes which could be exploited by polluters.<sup>50</sup> Though none were successful, he had effectively dictated the terms of the debate.

Hunter's envisaged Church was hard-headed and practical, prescient enough to recognise the reality of social change, and dynamic enough to meet it on its own terms. It was a Church less preoccupied with liturgical navel-gazing – of the kind that Fisher embarked upon on becoming archbishop<sup>51</sup> – than the conduct of a socially-relevant, culturally-resonant mission to society.

What made Hunter's views about the Church's role in the nation particularly significant was their influence on the perception within the Church of 'secularisation' and the means by which it should be met. The prominence of Hunter and his associates in such discussions enabled them to secure places of influence in discussions of Church reform. They helped to mould ecclesiastical structures which empowered churchmen, not least the parliamentary bishops, to engage with contemporary political discourse on social issues with renewed authority and vigour.

In making his case for such changes, Hunter could draw on the precedent set by Church organisations involved in matters of personal morality and sexual conduct, not least the MWC. Its reports on family issues from the mid-1950s had

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> *HL Deb.* 197, cc. 588-90, 605-7, 608, 612-14, 620, 623-4, 627, 629, 643-4, 646, 30 May 1956.

<sup>51</sup> Edward Carpenter, *Cantuar: archbishops in their office* (London, 1998), pp. 490-1; Purcell, *Fisher*, p. 202.

brought together not only spiritual and ecclesiastical expertise, but also contemporary legal, professional and academic insights.<sup>52</sup> To senior ecclesiastics in the Sheffield diocese, the MWC's success in influencing secular political discourse provided a powerful example to be emulated in the broader social and industrial sphere.

By the 1960s, the MWC could claim a number of successes, not least the Church's reappraisal of contraception at the 1958 Lambeth Conference. However, it was in its work on homosexuality that it attained greatest influence. In 1953, it established an 'inversion group' to study the practice and the law relating to homosexuality.<sup>53</sup> It brought together Anglican clergy with medical and legal practitioners.<sup>54</sup> Its 1954 interim report, *The problem of homosexuality*, was written in largely medical language, and essentially summarised contemporary medical thought on the sources of homosexuality. Crucially, the authors draw a distinction between Christian sin and criminal liability. The report was unambiguous in its claim that homosexual acts were inherently sinful. However, that did not imply that homosexual impulses, *per se*, were sinful. They were rather 'basically a psychological condition', either innate or acquired in childhood.<sup>55</sup> In short, homosexual acts were a social problem which required a social – that is to say, 'pastoral' – solution.<sup>56</sup> As the state did not interfere with the conduct of consenting

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<sup>52</sup> See reflections on the interactions between secular and spiritual expertise in G.R. Dunstan, 'The authority of a moral claim: Ian Ramsey and the practice of medicine', *Journal of medical ethics* 13 (1987), pp. 189-94.

<sup>53</sup> The group was convened in response to the interest generated by an article by an MWC lecturer in *Theology* which argued for the decriminalisation of homosexual conduct: Derrick Sherwin Bailey, 'The problem of sexual inversion', *Theology* 55 (1952), pp. 47-52.

<sup>54</sup> Grimley, 'Law, morality and secularisation', pp. 725-41; Graham Willett, 'The Church of England and the origins of homosexual law reform', *Journal of religious history* 33 (Dec. 2009), pp. 418-34. Compare with Patrick Higgins, *Heterosexual dictatorship: male homosexuality in post-war Britain* (London, 1996), esp. pp. 35-8.

<sup>55</sup> *The problem of homosexuality: an interim report* (London, 1954), esp. ch. 3.

<sup>56</sup> Timothy Jones, *Sexual politics in the Church of England, 1857-1957* (Oxford, 2013), pp. 178-80; Jones, 'Moral welfare', pp. 197-217.

adults in private in other areas of life, homosexual acts in private should be decriminalised.

The report proved influential in convincing the Home Office to establish a commission under John Wolfenden in August 1954 to examine ‘homosexual offences’.<sup>57</sup> After an investigation lasting three years, the Wolfenden Commission reported in September 1957 along the lines of the MWC report, recommending that homosexual acts in private between two consenting adults over 21 years of age should be legalised. The report made the same demarcation between enforcement of Christian morality and the responsibilities of the state. ‘There must remain a realm of private morality’, it concluded ‘which is, in brief but crude terms, not the law's business’.<sup>58</sup>

In the parliamentary debate which ensued in December 1957, the MWC made considerable efforts to ensure that its report would be influential. The interim report had already been circulated widely among parliamentarians and leaders of progressive opinion.<sup>59</sup> Peers, both for and against the departmental committee's proposals, situated their comments in relation to the MWC report, with several directly referencing its conclusions.<sup>60</sup>

Although they had no direct hand in the MWC's work, the Lords Spiritual plainly benefitted from the report's weight and the bravery of its conclusions.<sup>61</sup> The report, though it had sought contributions from secular experts, had been produced by a committee of the Assembly; in addressing the parliamentary debate, it became

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<sup>57</sup> It also considered, though with much less vigour, issues relating to prostitution.

<sup>58</sup> *Report of the committee on homosexual offences and prostitution* (London, 1957), quotation at p. 24.

<sup>59</sup> Jones, ‘Moral welfare’, pp. 206-7.

<sup>60</sup> See, for example, Earl Winterton's speech, *HL Deb.* 206, cc. 787-95, 4 Dec. 1957.

<sup>61</sup> See Lord Brabazon of Tara, *HL Deb.* 206, c. 761, 4 Dec. 1957; Wolfenden to Fisher, 5 Dec. 1957, FP 194/196.

necessary for the bishops to orient their comments in relation to the report's intellectual process and conclusions. In encouraging attendance at the House of Lords debate on the Wolfenden report in 1957, Fisher even read out the MWC report to the bishops at their meeting of that July.<sup>62</sup>

The MWC's work had a powerful effect on the attitudes of a number of bishops towards the essential legal issue. As recently as 1953, Fisher had been convinced of the 'social menace' of homosexuality which society had to protect itself against. To his diocese and in *The Times*, he launched a broadside in support of a universal Christian standard of social conduct, refuting the moral worth of scientific insight.<sup>63</sup> Yet, in the House in 1957 he accepted Wolfenden's findings. The Church Assembly had welcomed the committee's recommendations on homosexuality – if only narrowly<sup>64</sup> – and Fisher took it upon himself to represent 'the Church's view' in parliament. Claiming a role as a 'theist', he used his opportunity to draw out what was of real importance to national well-being: the distinction between crime and sin, and the nature of sin itself. The state, he argued, should not be concerned with 'saving the souls of men from their own destruction'; a sin only became a crime when it became a public offence. He concluded that the reduction of homosexual activity required social regulation; the casting out of homosexuals from society through criminal punishment would only impede this goal.<sup>65</sup> It is evident that Fisher's contribution was intellectually inspired by the principles of the MWC report.

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<sup>62</sup> Bishops' Meeting, 8-9 Jul. 1957, BM 14/145.

<sup>63</sup> 'The Archbishop's letter', *Canterbury diocesan notes* (Dec. 1953), typescript press release, BSR/MWC/HOM/1; *Times*, 25 Nov. 1953; Machin, *Churches and social issues*, p. 157.

<sup>64</sup> The recommendations were welcomed by 155 to 138.

<sup>65</sup> Prostitution in contrast was a form of commerce, and as such suitable for criminal regulation. *HL Deb.* 206, cc. 753-61, 4 Dec. 1957.

Others on the bench assumed a more critical stance. Still, their arguments were situated in the broader intellectual context of the reports of the MWC and the departmental committee. The central issue raised was not scriptural prohibition, but the proper conception and application of law to social problems. Christopher Chavasse of Rochester, the leading evangelical among the bishops, refuted the equation of ‘natural’ (i.e. heterosexual) and ‘unnatural’ (i.e. homosexual) vice. The distinction between ‘public’ and ‘private’ conduct had also been too hastily drawn, for ‘latent homosexuals’ needed protecting from the harmful influences of practicing homosexuals.<sup>66</sup> Thomas Bloomer of Carlisle similarly believed that legalisation of homosexual practices ‘would take away props from many people who need help’, and that the committees had been wrong in thinking that acts committed in private had no public effect. Bloomer went further still, refuting the central notion that an individual’s sexuality was outside of their own determination.<sup>67</sup>

Though the government refused to introduce legislation, it was clear that the Church had secured a position of influence in the debate. Expert ecclesiastical committees had, of course, previously gained a measure of political and social influence – not least the Association for Moral and Social Hygiene, and the Marriage Guidance Council. Yet for the most part, they had failed to exert significant influence over Church leaders, or broader ecclesiastical organisations.<sup>68</sup> What was significant in the late 1950s was the particular confluence of forces within the Church promoting political engagement in social issues which made wide-ranging change possible.

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<sup>66</sup> Ibid, cc. 796-8.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid, cc. 813-19.

<sup>68</sup> Ramsay, ‘Ambiguities’, p. 94.

For those seeking a more socially- and politically-engaged Church, the MWC's work had confirmed the manner in which influence over social discourse and policy could be wrested; through the blending of spiritual, personal, professional and scientific insight. Sheffield had been the 'crucible' – this was Wickham's terminology – largely for diocesan experimentation in mission; the MWC had been engaged in complementary work at a central ecclesiastical and national level. The theological and practical groundwork had been laid by the mid-1950s to carry reform to the Church at large.<sup>69</sup>

In the late 1950s Hunter and his associates used their position on (temporarily) influential Assembly committees to guide the rationalisation of ecclesiastical structures. They induced the Church to turn outwards, enhancing the means by which Christian insight and the 'social reality' could be reconciled and put before the nation. The implications for the character of the Church's engagement with public and political life were far-reaching.

The case for the reform of the Assembly was by the mid-1950s increasingly persuasive. Three decades into its life, it had outgrown its initial function as a legislative plenary body. Its remit had steadily, incrementally expanded in various directions; the Assembly's purpose had become confused, and thereby it had become ineffective. It needed to be reorganised, re-energised, and rationalised if it was to support churchmen, the bishops included, in re-engaging with contemporary society.

This was laid bare by the 1956 report of the Committee on Central Funds.<sup>70</sup> Hunter had been appointed among its fourteen original members, and it is clear from

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<sup>69</sup> Wickham, *Church and people*, p. 243.

<sup>70</sup> The review had its origins in an Assembly motion of 1953 calling for consideration of a new evangelism committee. National Assembly of the Church of England, *Report of proceedings* 33(3), 12 Nov. 1953, pp. 409-11; *Report of the committee on central funds* (Westminster, 1956), p. 7.

the content, tone, and even the lexicon of the resulting report that he was highly influential. ‘It was’, he recorded in retirement, ‘a time-consuming but necessary business’.<sup>71</sup> The Committee’s report of November 1956 devoted its attention to the definition of the Assembly’s role, and its suitability for the task ahead.<sup>72</sup> It noted that since the 1930s the Assembly had begun an absentminded sprawl as concern had grown among its members to study and engage with various social and moral issues.<sup>73</sup> By the mid-1950s, it had acquired or established 22 bodies driven by short-term necessity. *Ad hoc* expansion had resulted in costly duplication and anachronism, inadequacies in provision, and inefficiency all-round. The Assembly meanwhile, overly large and infrequently convened, lacked the means of monitoring, directing, and expressing a corporate view on the scatterings of these bodies.<sup>74</sup> The Assembly ‘did not quite know where they were going’, the chair of the committee Mrs Ridley commented in introducing the report, ‘and the whole thing seemed a bit cumbersome and out of hand’.<sup>75</sup>

To those conversant with the Sheffield diocese, the report’s suggestions of ecclesiastical mismanagement and social irrelevance were familiar. It acknowledged that churchmen had been relieved of much of their practical role in social care by the creation of the welfare state, but emphasised that the Church should not simply wash its hand of such matters. The leavening of Christian insight was vital if the resources marshalled by secular bureaucracy were to be ‘directed towards the right ends’. In

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<sup>71</sup> ‘Central Planning’, BHP 3/5/10.

<sup>72</sup> Although the initial resolution had called for consideration of a Council of Evangelism, only two of 62 pages in the report were devoted to this subject.

<sup>73</sup> Kenneth Thompson, *Bureaucracy and Church reform: the organizational response of the Church of England to social change 1800-1965* (Oxford, 1970), pp. 200-2.

<sup>74</sup> *Report of the committee on central funds*, pp. 12-15, 18-19. For more on the Committee’s report and the Assembly debates, see Thompson, *Bureaucracy*, pp. 208-11.

<sup>75</sup> National Assembly of the Church of England, *Report of proceedings* 36(3), 14 Nov. 1956, pp. 377-8.

rising to this, the Church needed the capacity to anticipate and recognise social change, and articulate a clear collective voice. In place of its existing irrational bureaucracy, it needed, in short

an organisation with the means to think and to study, sensitive to opinion and in touch with the leaders of thought in both Church and State, able to anticipate important issues before they arise, and in a position to command the best advice on any topic within its sphere.<sup>76</sup>

The Committee's solution was straightforward enough, though its radicalism was disguised in administrative language. The existing boards and councils were to be rationalised and regrouped into four departments – Education, External Relations, the Ministry, and Social Responsibility (BSR). These departments would coordinate central Church work in their respective areas, providing the efficiency and the flexibility needed to respond to a changing society.<sup>77</sup> They would be staffed by recognised experts, 'capable of meeting on equal terms with high-grade officials of the State and of other Churches'.<sup>78</sup> The committee placed particular emphasis on the importance of the Social Responsibility department, setting forth as its justification Hunter's well-worn argument about the secularisation of industrial society.<sup>79</sup> They identified a pressing need for

an organisation which is a focus of thought and study; which can co-ordinate by consultation rather than by coercion; and which will provide a source of information and advice for bishops, dioceses and societies.<sup>80</sup>

It would provide a forum in which professional, academic and ecclesiastical expertise could meet, drawing together the knowledge dispersed through spiritual

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<sup>76</sup> *Report of the committee on central funds*, pp. 15-16.

<sup>77</sup> National Assembly of the Church of England, *Report of proceedings* 36(3), 14 Nov. 1956, p. 381.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid*; *Report of the committee on central funds*, p. 19.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 32-4.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid*, p. 35.



and secular life. Through research and the production of reports, it would be informed by the latest thinking on social and industrial questions and legislation, enabling the Assembly ‘to give expression to the mind of the Church’. The Church and nation would gain an authoritative national Christian voice, an affirmation of the continuing relevance of Christian ethics.<sup>81</sup>

Throughout the passage of these reforms and the establishment of the Boards, Hunter and his associates continued to use their place on Assembly bodies to affirm the need for an increased focus on national policy and legalisation, and improved contact between ecclesiastic and political leaders.<sup>82</sup> Their influence was clear, for example, on the Assembly’s Social and Industrial Council (SIC), which included Wickham as its secretary, and counted Hunter as among its advocates and advisers.<sup>83</sup> In a report of 1959, it emphasised the imperative for the Church’s influence to be exerted at the highest national levels. ‘[S]ome responsible and competent group of people in touch with the study and research that is going forward’ was needed to provide a means for the Church to come to ‘a common mind and a common policy’ on social matters.<sup>84</sup> Introducing the report to the Assembly, Hunter emphasized the need to engage with working people on their own terms, and for a BSR ‘to initiate working parties and discussions at the national level’ to influence national institutions and life.<sup>85</sup>

Despite the force and consistency of such arguments, many churchmen had great reservations about the proposed growth of an apparently authoritarian central

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<sup>81</sup> Ibid, pp. 44-6. See also Fisher’s comments in Purcell, *Fisher*, p. 203.

<sup>82</sup> See, for example, *Report of the committee on central funds*, p. 36.

<sup>83</sup> Michael Atkinson, ‘A sort of episcopal fly on the walls of British industry’, in Gordon Hewitt (ed.) *Strategist for the spirit: Leslie Hunter, Bishop of Sheffield 1939-1962* (Oxford, 1985), p.162-3; ‘Central Planning’, BHP 3/5/10.

<sup>84</sup> *Task of the Church in relation to industry* (Westminster, 1959), esp. pp. 23, 26-36.

<sup>85</sup> National Assembly of the Church of England, *Report of proceedings* 39(2), 15 Jul. 1959, p. 230.

bureaucracy. In the Church Assembly, though the report of the Committee on Central Funds carried the overwhelming majority of the House of Laity, it was rejected by the bishops and clergy. During the plenary debate, concerns were expressed at the division of authority between the new boards at the centre, and the dioceses and parishes at the periphery. Some believed that carrying the committee's recommendations into effect would simply create a new layer of resource-intensive and remote bureaucracy. Bell – presumably well-versed in the views emanating from Sheffield – wondered whether the committee had approached its task 'with too much of a fixed pattern in its mind', and that the Church was in real danger of being 'organized too much as a business firm'.<sup>86</sup>

Most speakers, however, recognised the inadequacy of the central ecclesiastical approach to social issues. To Hunter and his associates, centralisation was essential if the Church was to relate – and be relatable to – contemporary society. The growth of central power was as inevitable, he noted in 1944, 'as the tide which washed the feet of King Canute'.<sup>87</sup> Fisher elected to proceed by resolution, and in the autumn of 1957 the Assembly agreed that it was essential that the Church promote 'a more Christian ordering of society', and assented to the establishment of a Board for Social Responsibility, and another for Education. The new BSR brought under its auspices the existing MWC and SIC, and was tasked 'to promote and co-ordinate the thought and action of the Church in matters affecting family, social and industrial life'.<sup>88</sup> Indicative of its heritage, Wolfenden was appointed as the BSR's

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<sup>86</sup> National Assembly of the Church of England, *Report of proceedings* 36(3), 14 Nov. 1956, pp. 377-437.

<sup>87</sup> Hunter, *Let us go forward*, p. 14.

<sup>88</sup> Memo., undated (Nov. 1956), BSR/BS/D/1.

inaugural chair, while Hunter assumed the chairmanship of the SIC, holding the position until 1967, well into his retirement.

The influence which these central organisations aspired to exert on the national conduct of the episcopate were met with suspicion and reluctance by many bishops. At their meeting of January 1957, reservations were expressed both that episcopal authority would be infringed by the Assembly's Standing Committee – which was to be reformed to enable better supervision and co-ordination of the work of the Boards – and that committees brought under the new Boards would lose their independence.<sup>89</sup> Two years later at a residential episcopal conference in Cambridge, Hunter presented the SIC report *The task of the Church in relation to industry* and again had to assuage fears that the Boards would trespass on the autonomy of the dioceses or further weaken the status of the Convocations – in fact, he argued, the vibrancy of diocesan and clerical life would act as a safeguard against totalitarianism.<sup>90</sup> Yet still, into the early 1960s, the anonymous author of *Crockford's* preface warned of the growing class of ecclesiastical administrators 'into whose hands the control of policy and strategy will surely fall'.<sup>91</sup> Even Hunter himself expressed concern that increased central organisation might unintentionally reduce the bishops' ability to contribute to national debate on an independent basis – it was their informed, but fundamentally individual Christian witness which was of value.<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>89</sup> Bishops' Meeting, 28-29 Jan. 1957, BM 14/119-20.

<sup>90</sup> 'Central Planning', BHP 3/5/10, p. 2; Hunter, *Let us go forward*, p. 14; Carpenter, *Fisher*, pp. 243-4.

<sup>91</sup> *Times*, 1 Nov. 1962. See also Green on the effect of the 'managerial revolution' on discussions of ecclesiastical governance, S.J.D. Green, *The passing of protestant England: secularisation and social change, c. 1920-1960* (Cambridge, 2011), pp. 282-5.

<sup>92</sup> It was on these grounds that he disliked the practice which developed of briefing bishops before debates. Ecclestone 'A bishop in parliament', p. 145.

That such concerns were pervasive was the result of the ambiguity about the actual role of the BSR. It was to investigate matters of social concern in light of both secular and spiritual expertise, in the words of its first chairman,

to stimulate the thought of those who are expert in any given field, and to bring them together so that, for instance, the thinking of the theologian is not entirely divorced from that of the sociologist on matters of common concern.<sup>93</sup>

Yet its specific functions, processes and responsibilities were left uncertain. This was intentional. Fisher hoped that, without clear direction from ecclesiastical leaders, the Board could respond dynamically to the needs of the Church and society at any one time. It was a decision which led initially to much conflict between the BSR's constituent councils, yet still Fisher saw no reason why it 'should not find [its own] feet'.<sup>94</sup>

The possibility that the reorganisation of the Church Assembly might reduce the bishops' independence was further, and most obviously, increased by the associated appointment of a lay assistant to support the archbishop in the coordination of administrative matters. Fisher had long resisted the advent of such a position, probably believing that it would interpose between the archbishop and those seeking to approach him.<sup>95</sup> However, the reorganisation of the Assembly made it a necessity. If Fisher was to undertake the role envisaged for the archbishop on the reformed Standing Committee, he needed to be briefed on the business of all subsidiary boards and committees: an additional task beyond the means of a man already overburdened. Fisher also had a view to his impending retirement, believing

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<sup>93</sup> Wolfenden memo., Dec. 1960, FP 254/288-93.

<sup>94</sup> Fisher memo., 6 Feb. 1959, FP 229/259.

<sup>95</sup> Fisher to Campbell, 20 Sept. 1958, FP 189/170. These were concerns expressed by Herbert Waddams, a leading candidate to be the inaugural Lay Secretary. Waddams to Fisher, 28 May 1958, FP 205/269-71.

that no successor – least of all his most likely and eventual successor, Michael Ramsey – possessed the capacity to address the expanding ecclesiastical and ecumenical responsibilities of the archbishop's office.<sup>96</sup>

As with the BSR, the duties of the new lay role were poorly defined. The archbishop needed assistance, that was clear, but was the incumbent to deal with the archbishop's relations with the Church Assembly, or solely with its boards and councils, or take responsibility for press and public relations, or engagement with government departments and the Civil Service?<sup>97</sup>

Robert Beloe was eventually appointed to the post in February 1959.<sup>98</sup> Educated at Winchester College and Hertford College, Oxford, Beloe was Director of Education for Surrey County Council, and had been a member of the 1951 Royal Commission on Marriage and Divorce.<sup>99</sup> His exact duties having been left open-ended, initially he set about ascertaining which areas of the archbishop's work he might best put his skills to use. The result, perhaps unsurprisingly, was a 'painfully idle and unproductive' first six months. But he soon set about supporting the role of the bishops in the House of Lords as 'a continuing exercise'. If there was a suggestion of the improving mechanisms of central control over the parliamentary bishops' bench, it was here. Beloe built up contacts with the Whips' Offices, government departments and senior Civil Service, and thereby secured advance notice of the relevant business. He became deeply involved in the arrangement of the

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<sup>96</sup> Fisher to Campbell, 20 Sept. 1957, Fisher 189/170; Waddams memo., 28 Sept. 1957, FP 189/168-9. See also, Owen Chadwick, *Michael Ramsey: a life* (Oxford, 1990), p. 103; Hein, *Fisher*, p. 100.

<sup>97</sup> Waddams to Fisher, 15 Feb. 1958, FP 205/263-4; Waddams to Fisher, 14 Mar. 1958, FP 205/265-7; Waddams to Fisher, 18 May 1958, FP 205/269-71; Grubb to Fisher, 14 Jul. 1958, FP 205/274.

<sup>98</sup> Fisher to Beloe, 2 Feb. 1959, FP 223/265; Beloe to Fisher, 14 Feb. 1959, FP 223/268-9. See comments on Fisher's appointment of the Lay Secretary and a number of senior chaplains, Alan Webster, 'Fisher, Geoffrey Francis, Baron Fisher of Lambeth (1887-1972)', ODNB.

<sup>99</sup> H. G. Judge, 'Beloe, Robert (1905-1984)', ODNB; Stephen Cretney, *Law, law reform and the family* (Oxford, 1998), p. 44.

bishops' bench, ensuring that Lords Spiritual were in attendance during debates in which a Christian voice was required, advising bishops of forthcoming business of personal interest and the best opportunities to intervene, and, where possible, supplying them with material to inform their contributions.<sup>100</sup>

Latent – and, in some ways, blatant – within the reforms to improve episcopal conduct in the House was a significant increase in central authority over the bishops' bench.<sup>101</sup> By the early 1960s, the Lords Spiritual had gained a greater sense of their place within parliamentary debate, yet a great deal of ambiguity and intrigue surrounded their relationship to the central Church bureaucracy. It was telling that, while in July 1957 Hunter had struggled to draw the bishops' attention to their conduct in House of Lords,<sup>102</sup> by 1961 others raised concerns at the apparent diminution of the episcopal independence. At the Bishops' Meeting of January that year, Launcelot Fleming of Norwich presented a draft memorandum on the responsibilities of episcopal engagement in the House which he proposed be circulated to all new Lords Spiritual. It suggested that, while on matters affecting the Church's property, rights or rules, they could expect to be briefed by official Church bodies, bishops should otherwise be free to speak and vote in the House as they chose. The Church, it claimed, did not deplore division between the parliamentary bishops on any matter which involved public morality, social or political reform, or 'the welfare of the nation, the Commonwealth or mankind as a whole'.

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<sup>100</sup> Beloe memo., 29 May 1969, Bel. MS 3256/251-6. For more on the Lay Secretary, see Francis Bown, 'Influencing the House of Lords: the role of the Lords Spiritual 1979-1987', *Political studies* 42 (1994), pp. 107-8; Carpenter, *Cantuar*, pp. 513-14; Kenneth Medhurst and George Moyser, 'Lambeth Palace, the bishops and politics', in George Moyser (ed.), *Church and politics today: the role of the Church of England in contemporary politics* (Edinburgh, 1985), pp. 99-101.

<sup>101</sup> William Purcell commented briefly on the 'central direction' of ecclesiastical reform, though, due to his focus on Archbishop Fisher, his interest was in the Assembly's Standing Committee. Purcell, *Fisher*, p. 203.

<sup>102</sup> Bishops' Meeting, 8-9 Jul. 1957, BM 14/143-4.

[I]t is of the essence of the Church of England that there should be difference of opinion reached as the result of individuals' appeal to Christian conscience.

Whether or not opinions differ, it is essential that views of the leaders of the Church of England should be heard in the House where by the constitution they are placed.<sup>103</sup>

Still, the memorandum implied that if the Church was to provide better support for the bishops' work in the House, central organisation and oversight from Lambeth were absolutely necessary. The draft was welcomed by the bishops, and carried the approval of Fisher's signature. Still, the fact that Fleming had even been motivated to create it belied a sense of anxiety, a concern that future Lords Spiritual would simply assume a responsibility to represent the views of central ecclesiastical organisations, over their own independent Christian witness.

The historical literature has cast Fisher's archiepiscopate as one of relative stability, in juxtaposition to the social and cultural turmoil of the 1960s.<sup>104</sup> However, in terms of the Church's engagement with institutional politics – and, indeed, in several other areas – this was actually a period of significant change. Since the establishment of the Church Assembly in 1919, the Church had been organised for worship; after the late 1950s, it came to organise itself for Mission.

The cause of the change in the conduct of the parliamentary bishops after 1920 and after the mid-1950s was essentially the same: the perception among influential churchmen of the Church's dislocation from society. However, unlike in the 1920s when reformers were concerned to reinvigorate the spiritual life and leadership of the Church, the concern in the post-war period was to ensure that

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<sup>103</sup> Bishops' Meeting, 26-27 Jan. 1961, BM 15/3 and Supplementary Paper 1.

<sup>104</sup> Norman, *Church and society*, ch. 9; Webster, 'Fisher', ODNB.

Christian values continued to exert an influence in the central institutions of governance. The difference was in the ecclesiastical context. It was not simply that the Church's place in the nation was believed to have declined, but that it – indeed, Christianity itself – had become separated from the mainstream of political and social discourse.

The reformers sought to increase the influence of spiritual values in the national debate, but not necessarily to impose upon it or to direct it. In seeking to encourage churchmen to acknowledge and relate to the 'social reality', there was an implicit acknowledgement that the Church's voice numbered among many in civic society. The bishops could not claim any greater innate authority to define the social relations of a 'secular society' than, for instance, medical practitioners might possess. An acknowledgement of intellectual diversity and an appetite for compromise was required if the Church was to secure influence. The House of Lords, with its temperate discussions and mixed professional membership (particularly after 1958), provided an ideal setting for this formulation of the religious establishment to be acted upon.

The aspiration of reformers was for the bishops to be able to apply better their individual Christian witnesses to the work of parliament. Yet the mechanisms devised to enable this placed great influence over the bishops' bench in the hands of Assembly committees and, above all, the Archbishop of Canterbury. Securing influence in parliament required the encouragement of a particular form of conduct. A trade-off was necessary, between preserving the episcopal freedom to organise their affairs as they saw fit on the one hand, and the central organisation required to ensure that the Church's mission to the nation was fulfilled on the other.



## 8. The Lords Spiritual and ‘permissive’ legislation

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The bishops’ re-engagement with parliament after the late 1950s was suggestive of a broader, structured ecclesiastical approach towards the ‘secular society’. However, securing influence in parliamentary debate necessitated a compromise; the bishops had to be encouraged to participate in debates, and to do so in a particular fashion. The independence of the bishops on the parliamentary bench, so evident in the inter-war period, had to be curtailed.

The extent to which this was the case was most apparent in the bishops’ contributions to matters of the regulation of social conduct and private morality. This was an area of legislation which became increasingly prominent in the 1960s, particularly during the premiership of Harold Wilson from 1964. It was also, of course, of significant interest to the churches, and related directly to the work of the BSR.

Under the influence and direction of the Lay Secretary and, through him, the BSR, the bishops established a constructive place in the parliamentary discourse on these matters. They claimed a role in the House’s balance of expertise, adopting the language – if not the practices – of ‘sociology’ in order to assert their equal status alongside the scientific, sociological and medical competencies in the chamber. The Lords Spiritual largely succeeded in asserting an essentially ‘Christian’ influence over the moral regulation of the ‘secular society’, but it came at a price. The Archbishop of Canterbury’s influence over the parliamentary bishops, implicit and informal at so many times in the past, became more regularly and more strongly asserted. The bishops acted increasingly in the House as a unit, concerned to articulate less their individual Christian witness, than to impart an essentially Christian means of approaching and understanding ethical issues.

The opening forays of the ‘permissive decade’ under Macmillan’s Conservatives recalled issues on which the Church’s parliamentary practice had been long established. The immediate effect of the creation of the BSR, and in particular the Lay Secretary, was merely to make these existing approaches more rigorous. In the case of the government’s intention, announced in 1960, to reconsider the regulation of alcohol licensing and gambling,<sup>1</sup> Beloe and the BSR gave increased structure to the established Church’s role in co-ordinating and expressing the sentiment of the British churches.

The BSR began a consultation with Anglican agencies, and subsequently with ecumenical organisations such as the Temperance Council of the Christian Churches, to identify areas of joint concern.<sup>2</sup> Where these were identified, for example in their opposition to licensed establishments opening over Easter and Christmas, Beloe and Ramsey arranged for concerns to be put before ministers and civil servants.<sup>3</sup> When the Temperance Council was successful in encouraging amendments along these lines, Beloe helped it to find supporters among the bishops, and to ensure that bishops who had been briefed and could speak authoritatively were present at the debate.<sup>4</sup>

On these ‘traditional’ moral issues, on which ecumenical partnerships had formed decades earlier, Beloe and the BSR acted as aids to the efficiency of the existing system. It was a mode of parliamentary engagement which persisted well into the late 1960s in relation to the issues of gambling and licensing.<sup>5</sup> As the social

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<sup>1</sup> *HC Deb.* 616, 29 Jan. 1960, cc. 501-93.

<sup>2</sup> Memo., 7 Feb. 1961, FP 265/183-4; BSR Licensing Bill brief, undated (June 1961), RP 9/183. See also, BSR/T/LIC.

<sup>3</sup> Beloe memo., 21 Jul. 1961, RP 9/199-200; 23 Jul. 1961, Ramsey to Butler, RP 9/205; Butler to Ramsey, 4 Aug. 1961, RP 9/210.

<sup>4</sup> Davies to Ramsey, 1 Jul. 1961, RP 9/178-9; Davies circular to Lords Spiritual, 20 Jul. 1961, RP 9/201-3; Beloe to Wilson, 24 Jul. 1961, RP 9/208-9.

<sup>5</sup> See, for example, discussions within the BSR on the Gaming Bill 1968. BSR/BD/D/5.

reform agenda developed, it became less concerned with the traditional moral vices like drinking and gambling, and, particularly from 1963, more concerned with the regulation of personal morality – abortion rights, access to divorce, and homosexual conduct. The bishops' place in the parliamentary debate underwent a rapid reconfiguration.

In the first place, the advent of the Lay Secretary greatly increased the Church's capacity to resist change, to influence debate on the basis of their aversion to the undermining of the Christian basis of such laws. Beloe also sought to ensure that the bishops could plausibly claim that their interventions were not based on doctrinal or scriptural injunctions, but on their 'sociological' concern for the welfare of the families involved and the nation. In such a way, Christian influence over the outcome of the legislative initiative was enhanced, while being simultaneously cast in non-Christian terms.

This contrast in the approach adopted by the Lords Spiritual to the expansion of the causes of divorce between the 1930s and 1960s was stark. In considering the proposals of 1937, Archbishop Lang had felt compelled to assume an ambiguous position in the House of Lords. He confessed difficulty in reconciling his understanding of the practical need for reform, and the Christian imperative to uphold lifelong marriage.<sup>6</sup> Along with Temple and Winnington-Ingram, and a number of other bishops, he abstained from voting. Such difficulties necessarily arose, he confided to the 2nd Earl of Selborne, when approaching the moral regulation of 'a very imperfectly Christian population'.<sup>7</sup> By 1938, the Convocations had followed suit, acknowledging the distinction between the expectations on

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<sup>6</sup> *HL Deb.* 105, cc. 743-51, 24 Jun. 1937.

<sup>7</sup> Lang to Selborne, 14 Jul. 1927, Selb. 2 88/196.

Christians in their moral conduct, and the growing requirements of the state and society.<sup>8</sup>

Such difficulties had only been compounded when the Labour MP Leo Abse introduced a bill in 1962 which proposed the introduction of ‘breakdown’, as evidenced by seven years’ separation, to the existing causes for divorce. The churches’ public position of opposition was unambiguous. Following conversations initiated by Aubrey Vine, General Secretary of the Free Church Federal Council, Beloe organised a joint statement for April 1963 from the Anglican archbishops of Canterbury, York, and Wales, the Archbishop of Birmingham on behalf of the Roman Catholic hierarchy, and the Moderator and General Secretary of the Free Church Federal Council.<sup>9</sup> The signatories conveyed their ‘great concern’ at the addition of ‘breakdown’, ‘a dangerous new principle’ in marriage law. They opposed any measure which undermined the popular conception of marriage as ‘a lifelong covenant’, and claimed that in doing so were fulfilling their duty ‘to uphold the Christian meaning of marriage’ for the welfare of state and people.<sup>10</sup>

In parliament, however, Beloe expended great efforts to ensure that the bishops in the House of Lords were not associated with the orchestration of Christian opposition. He focused in the first instance on the House of Commons, arranging with leading Christians, both Conservative and Labour, for the bill to be ‘talked out’

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<sup>8</sup> G.I.T. Machin, ‘Marriage and the churches in the 1930s: royal abdication and divorce reform, 1936-7’, *Journal of ecclesiastical history* 41 (1991), p. 79; G.I.T. Machin, *Churches and social issues in twentieth-century Britain* (Oxford, 1998), pp. 99-106.

<sup>9</sup> Vine to Ramsey, 14 Feb. 1963, RP 43/60; Beloe to Jones and Morris, 1 Apr. 1963, RP 43/124-7. Though he tried, Beloe could not secure the support of the Chief Rabbi as the Jewish conception of divorce already conceded an element of consent. Beloe memo, 29 Mar. 1963, RP 43/122.

<sup>10</sup> *Times*, 3 Apr. 1963; *Church of England Newspaper*, 5 Apr. 1963; *Tablet*, 6 Apr. 1963. See Stephen Cretney, *Law, law reform and the family* (Oxford, 1998), pp. 44-6; Lewis and Wallis, ‘Fault, breakdown, and the Church of England’, pp. 310-14; Machin, *Churches and social issues*, pp. 201-2.

unless the ‘breakdown’ clause was dropped.<sup>11</sup> He also encouraged a letter-writing campaign from Church organisations, and co-ordinated joint-church approaches to the Commons Standing Committee in March 1963.<sup>12</sup>

Faced with such opposition, Abse withdrew the clause providing for divorce by separation at the bill’s third reading in the Commons.<sup>13</sup> He, and the supporters of ‘breakdown’, left little question as to the cause of the defeat: the work of a ‘professional’ House, seeking to legislate for a ‘secular society’, had been frustrated by increasingly illegitimate religious interests. In a bitter concession speech, he attacked the ‘clamour’ from the churches. Theirs was not any concern or sympathy for the observable suffering the existing law had caused. Rather, their opposition was based on the idea that the clause would ‘emancipate divorce law from all the humbug and pretence’ which existed because ‘divorce law is now choked by the doctrine of the matrimonial offence’.<sup>14</sup>

Supporters of the clause, he contended, were those who believed that the institution of marriage should promote the welfare of the family; when the continuance of a marriage was harmful to the welfare of its participants, their children, and society, ‘then on this earth, whatever may be the position in Heaven’, the marriage should be dissolved.<sup>15</sup> The clause’s opponents on the other hand were castigated in religious terms, as the ‘sanctimonious’ defenders of ‘medieval,

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<sup>11</sup> Beloe memo., 28 Mar. 1963, RP 43/119-20; Beloe memo., 9 Apr. 1963, RP 43/137; Fletcher to Ramsey, 16 Apr. 1963, RP 43/144.

<sup>12</sup> Free Church Federal Council to members of the Standing Committee, 1 Mar. 1963, RP 43/110-1; Beloe memo., 4 Mar. 1963, RP 43/93-4; Beloe memo., 19 Mar. 1963, RP 43/101-2; Beloe memo., 28 Mar. 1963, RP 43/121.

<sup>13</sup> *HC Deb.* 676, cc. 1555-68, 3 May 1963; Beloe to Riches, 21 May 1963, RP 43/157-8.

<sup>14</sup> *HC Deb.* 676, cc. 1557-8, 3 May 1963.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, c. 1559.

ecclesiastical law'. They casually discarded social and judicial needs in their headlong pursuit of a sacramental conception of marriage.<sup>16</sup>

Abse's contrast of rationality and compassion with doctrinal inflexibility and religious bigotry also received an airing in the sympathetic press. *The Economist* implied that the religious opposition to the bill had been philosophically incoherent. The bill had succumbed 'to prejudice, hypocrisy and insularity acting in the guise of Christian principles'.<sup>17</sup> *The Times* meanwhile, couching its words more soberly, was unable to interpret anything but religious 'dogma' and the 'theological view' in the churches' opposition.<sup>18</sup>

Beloe was clearly aware of the growing potency of such arguments. To the leaders of social thought, traditional Christian teachings seemed incompatible with the practical needs of contemporary society. As such, decisive interventions by the churches were increasingly denounced by the proponents of reform as illegitimate. It was this perception which guided Beloe's organisation of the Lords Spiritual; they were to be cast in a similar light to the proponents of reform, their concern for the wellbeing of families and society having simply led them to a different conclusion.

In the first place, Beloe sought to make it clear that the bishops had no overt role as the ringleaders of a reactionary Christian opposition. When attempts were made to reinsert 'breakdown' at the Lords' Committee Stage, he was approached by Derek Worlock, then Private Secretary to the Roman Catholic Archbishop of Westminster, who assured him that Catholic peers would be glad to coordinate their efforts with Anglican peers, if so desired.<sup>19</sup> Worlock made the assumption that

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid, cc. 1559-60.

<sup>17</sup> *Economist*, 11 May 1963.

<sup>18</sup> *Times*, 20 Jun. 1963.

<sup>19</sup> Worlock to Beloe, 31 May 1963, RP 43/173.

opposition to ‘breakdown’ would be led in the debate by the Archbishop of Canterbury, who might then be supported by Catholic peers.<sup>20</sup> Beloe was clear that the bishops were to assume no such role. Instead, lay peers were to front the Christian opposition to ‘breakdown’.<sup>21</sup> After some difficulty, Ramsey and Beloe eventually settled for this to be the Conservative Lord Hawke, who undertook to advise Anglican peers that they should attend the division ‘to speak and to vote so that this Clause is rejected’.<sup>22</sup>

The bishops meanwhile were arranged by Beloe so as not to provide grounds for the accusation that they sought undue influence in the debate. In a memorandum for Ramsey, under the telling subtitle ‘How to secure rejection of Mr. Abse’s clause’ Beloe urged the archbishop not to appear ‘as the whipper up of opposition’. The bishops’ presence in the House meanwhile was strictly regulated. A balance needed to be struck: sufficient Lords Spiritual were required to maintain the resolve of their supporters, but an ‘excessive’ episcopal showing needed to be avoided lest it provoke an outcry of religious interference.<sup>23</sup>

Those bishops who did speak were advised to couch their words in moderate, conciliatory tones.<sup>24</sup> Ronald Williams of Leicester impressed upon the peers that little would be achieved if those on either side of the debate ‘accuse[d] the other of low and unworthy motives’. He recognised ‘the sympathy, the humanity and courtesy’ that motivated Abse, but urged that those who opposed the clause should be spared ‘being classified as either bigots, fanatics or hypocrites’.<sup>25</sup> The bishops

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<sup>20</sup> Worlock to Beloe, 10 Jul. 1963, RP 43/200.

<sup>21</sup> See, for example, Beloe to Lincoln, 21 May 1963, RP 43/157-8.

<sup>22</sup> Ramsey to Hawke, 13 Jun. 1963, RP 43/184-5; Bridgeman to Ramsey, 19 Jun. 1963, RP 43/193.

<sup>23</sup> Beloe memo, 31 May 1963, RP 43/171-2.

<sup>24</sup> Beloe memo, 20 Jun. 1963, RP 43/194-6.

<sup>25</sup> *HL Deb.* 250, cc. 395-6, 22 May 1963.

sought to reclaim the compassionate grounds which had been captured by the clause's proponents. Above all they expressed concern for the welfare of society, balancing the specific needs of married couples with the broader needs of the nation. They placed themselves within the terms of the existing parliamentary debate, as a constructive – avowedly not a regressive – influence.<sup>26</sup>

In the House, Ramsey categorically rejected both 'breakdown' and the suggestion that the churches sought to compel Christian behaviours on non-Christian people. His concern lay 'with what is likely to be good and right for the country as a whole', not to impose the specific teachings of the churches. He expressed sympathy with those distressed by the existing law, but asked the peers to consider justice in the abstract. The greatest social harm would be caused by suggesting that there was 'an honourable respectable way' of ending a marriage. Strong marriages and families would be undermined by temptation if there were a wholly blameless means of dissolving them.<sup>27</sup> The bench's leading ethicist, Mortimer of Exeter, affirmed that the bishops were 'in complete agreement' with Ramsey's approach and position. If legislators provided for 'compulsory divorce', it would 'strike a grave blow at the stability of marriage and thereby run the risk of creating far more unhappiness'. The language of Christian belief was entirely absent from his contribution.<sup>28</sup> Ramsey and six other bishops voted against the reinsertion of the clause; the division came out in their favour by 52 votes to 31.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Leicester to Beloe, 16 May 1963, RP 43/155; Beloe to bishops of Chichester, Oxford, Norwich, St. Edmundsbury and Ipswich, and Winchester, 5 Jun. 1963, RP 43/174; Beloe to Jones, 16 Jul. 1963, RP 43/206.

<sup>27</sup> *HL Deb.* 250, cc. 1543-7, 21 Jun. 1963.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, cc. 1572-3.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, c. 1579. The Archbishop of Canterbury and bishops of Chichester, St. Edmundsbury and Ipswich, Exeter, Lichfield, and Winchester voted against the reinsertion of the clause.



The clear concern of Church authorities was for the bishops to claim a basis for their interventions which accorded with the nature of political debate in contemporary society. As the 1960s progressed, an increasingly concerted effort was made to claim a professional, ‘sociological’ basis for the Lords Spiritual’s expressions. This first became apparent during the discussions of marriage reform in 1963. Responding to the accusations of religious bigotry in *The Times*, Ramsey claimed that the bishops’ oppositional position was the result of ‘sociological considerations concerning the deep wellbeing of society’.<sup>30</sup>

The bishops had begun to assume the ‘secular’ lexicon, but they had not yet adopted the rational, scientific processes championed by the ‘secular society’. The change in the language used by the Lords Spiritual was a means of wresting influence in parliamentary debate, of maintaining some semblance of the influence of traditional Christian teachings.

However, though ecclesiastical leaders had secured a victory, they recognised its potentially pyrrhic nature. Reform had been halted by the marshalling of Christian forces, but in so doing, the established Church had stood in the way of public sentiment and the majority in the House of Commons, and had attracted condemnation from the press. As acknowledgement of ‘secular society’ gathered apace after 1963, it became forcefully apparent to Church leaders that continued influence of the kind witnessed over the Abse bill was unsustainable. Actions which heightened the perception of the Church as a regressive social influence, ignorant – even wilfully ignorant – of the needs of modern society, would ultimately serve to diminish Christian influence in the nation. During the discussions of the Abse bill,

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<sup>30</sup> *HL Deb.* 250, cc. 1543-7, 21 Jun. 1963.

Viscount Dilhorne, the Lord Chancellor, warned Ramsey that the Lords Spiritual risked ‘a sort of bishops v. the people situation’.<sup>31</sup> Meanwhile, the Home Secretary, Henry Brooke, cautioned Beloe in January 1964 that the Church had been in an oppositional mode for too long; a show of compassion would do it a great deal of good.<sup>32</sup>

Ramsey and Beloe recognised that a more constructive approach to parliamentary debates, one which better accorded with contemporary political discourse on social matters, was required. Before the bishops had even voted on the ‘breakdown’ clause, Ramsey had commissioned a formal investigation into the dissolution of marriage, and in particular the question of substituting all other grounds for divorce with that of irreconcilable breakdown.<sup>33</sup> The work of this group, as others on various social issues, came to have a significant effect on the bishops’ conduct in the House of Lords. Beloe’s efforts had made them a more effective political force, but victories won in contradiction to the social and political discourse could only be short-lived. Lasting influence was to be achieved by working constructively with the dominant political discourse.

The social reforms of the early 1960s under Conservative governments had been limited in scope, confined to more ‘traditional’ concerns – such as alcohol licensing and gambling – or those issues on which there was already a broad consensus, as with divorce. With the election of Harold Wilson’s Labour administration in October 1964, more ambitious social reforms began to emerge. Among the earliest significant initiatives, legislation along the lines of the 1957

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<sup>31</sup> Ramsey to Archbishop of York, 27 Mar. 1963, RP 43/116-17.

<sup>32</sup> Beloe to Horny, 27 Jan. 1964, RP 62/42.

<sup>33</sup> Beloe memo, 21 May 1963, RP 43/5-6.

Wolfenden report on ‘homosexual offences’ was introduced by the Earl of Arran in late May 1965.

As they had been in the late 1950s, the bishops were prominent in the debate.<sup>34</sup> They benefited from their association – direct and indirect – with the MWC report, and through it the nature of the developing discourse on the issue. Indeed, it was clear that Ramsey and Beloe were determined to heighten these associations. Both expended considerable effort to ensure that the bishops’ bench appeared united on – or at the very least, decisively in favour of – the conclusions which had been arrived at by the Home Office committee, and the MWC group of clerics, doctors, and lawyers. For example, Beloe gave repeated encouragement to Jones of St. Albans, who chaired the MWC when the interim report was published, to assume a prominent role alongside Ramsey at critical stages of the bill’s progress.<sup>35</sup>

Beloe’s efforts to organise the bishops’ bench went further still, verging on whip-like behaviour. Those opposed to Wolfenden’s principles – such as Bloomer of Carlisle – were consistently excluded from correspondence relating to reform. The bishops were given a clear understanding that support for Wolfenden’s recommendations in parliament was desired by ecclesiastical authorities. Those who found themselves opposed to liberalisation were glad to be relieved of their responsibility to speak in the House. Ronald Williams of Leicester’s position was particularly fraught; though he chaired the BSR, he was uncertain of the proposals. He confided to Beloe of his relief at learning that he would not be asked to assume a lead on the bench.

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<sup>34</sup> *HL Deb.* 266, 12 May 1965, cc. 71-172; *HL Deb.* 266, 24 May 1965, cc. 631-52.

<sup>35</sup> Beloe to St. Albans, 22 Sept. 1965, RP 78/210; *HL Deb.* 269, 28 Oct. 1965, cc. 694-6.

I know I am in a minority of one among enlightened people, so I am glad that others should bear the responsibility for what I regard as an extremely problematic venture in legislation.<sup>36</sup>

Beloe and Ramsey remained in close correspondence with Arran throughout the bill's passage, seeking to amend it to reflect better Wolfenden's conclusions. As introduced, the bill consisted of just one clause, which decriminalised homosexual acts between consenting adults over 21 years of age. Wolfenden's report had covered a great deal more ground, particularly in regard to the law's relation to under-21s. Arran, Beloe and Ramsey had discussed these concerns before the introduction of the bill, and the peer invited the Lords Spiritual to introduce amendments along Wolfenden's lines.<sup>37</sup> Beloe set about drafting the amendments with the assistance of the MWC, remaining in close contact with Arran, Wolfenden and the MWC throughout. They eventually secured the assistance of Parliamentary Counsel, thanks to the support of the Home Office, to assist in the drafting.<sup>38</sup>

Although ecclesiastical authorities clearly desired to amend the bill along the lines of the MWC and Wolfenden reports, the bishops did not speak – with the possible exception of Jones – for the MWC. Nor did they speak with authority derived from the Church Assembly's (albeit, narrow) approval of the committee's recommendations.<sup>39</sup> In fact, only Stockwood referred to the Assembly's resolution,

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<sup>36</sup> Bishop of Leicester to Beloe, 6 Apr. 1965, RP 78/26, 30. The bishop eventually spoke at the second reading of the Sexual Offences (No. 2) Bill in July 1967. However, his speech in effect amounted to a concession; the argument had been lost, though he personally regretted it. *HL Deb.* 284, 13 Jul. 1967, cc. 1306-8.

<sup>37</sup> Ramsey to Arran, 18 May 1965, RP 78/47; Beloe 'Notes for a speech', 24 May 1965, RP 78/66-7; Beloe to Edwards, 31 May 1965, RP 78/75; Dunstan to Beloe, 31 May 1965, RP 78/78-81. See also, *Times*, 29 May 1965.

<sup>38</sup> Arran to Ramsey, 26 May 1965, RP 78/71; Beloe memo, 31 May 1965, RP 78/83-5; Beloe to Archbishop of York, copied to the bishops of London and Chichester, 2 Jun. 1965, RP 78/118-19; Beloe to Arran, 3 Jun. 1965, RP 78/123; Beloe memo., 22 Jun. 1965, RP 78/158-60; Stonham to Ramsey, 3 Jul. 1965, RP 78/179; Stonham to Ramsey, 9 Jul. 1965, RP 78/182-6.

<sup>39</sup> National Assembly of the Church of England, *Report of proceedings* 37 (3), 14 Nov. 1957. The recommendations were welcomed by 155 to 138.

and even then only in brief response to Lord Brocket's assertion that the Church was disunited on the matter.<sup>40</sup>

Rather, they claimed a place in the debate on the basis of their 'sociological' expertise – the use of such language being lent credibility by the bench's association, explicit and implicit, with the findings and processes of the MWC and Wolfenden reports. In debate, the bishops were unambiguous that homosexual acts were, *per se*, immoral. However, they did not seek to condemn or apportion blame for such actions. Rather, they emphasised their responsibility to help homosexuals struggling to reconcile unwanted impulses and the 'proper' order of life. Their concern was 'compassionate', to ameliorate the alienation and suffering which had been caused by the existing law in order that social good might result.

Although the bishops emphasised their 'sociological' reasons for assuming this position, their use of the term was not straightforward. Their support of the principles of the MWC and Wolfenden reports suggested an engagement with contemporary medical and legal thought, though they had not themselves been involved with the conduct of sociological study in a technical way. If the references to 'sociology' had any academic connotation, it would imply an amateurish, subjective, and circumstantial approach to the subject. What the bishops intended was different: the professional meaning of a qualification based on pastoral responsibilities and experiences – a suggestion that, as men engaged daily in ministering to the population, they could claim a sophisticated understanding of social relations.

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<sup>40</sup> *HL Deb.* 266, cc. 688-95, 24 May 1965.

Lewis Charles-Edwards of Worcester based his authority on his ‘ministry of nearly 40 years’, in which he had the ‘privilege to give what help I can to a number of homosexuals’.<sup>41</sup> His experiences had heightened his concerns about the existing law; he had learned not to stand in judgement, and of the trauma experienced by homosexual men, whose lives had been dogged by a sense of guilt and were afraid to seek ‘help’. ‘[F]rankly’, he concluded, ‘to me, this is primarily a pastoral problem. My profession has inevitably made it so’.<sup>42</sup> Stockwood echoed these sentiments. ‘As a parish priest for many years’, he felt compelled to contribute. His pastoral task of providing guidance to homosexuals was ‘just about as difficult as it could be’ in an atmosphere ‘vitiating by a sense of fear’. He offered two instances when men in his care had committed suicide for fear of prosecution and under the threat of blackmail. With two large prisons in his diocese – Wandsworth and Brixton – he was also able to speak of the effects of imprisonment. In his conversations with inmates, he had come to the conclusion ‘prison is the worst possible treatment for the homosexual ... It is surely as absurd as locking up an alcoholic in the bar of a public house’.<sup>43</sup>

The bishops had, of course, previously claimed authority on the basis of ecclesiastical experience. Their authority as diocesan administrators came to the fore in the interwar period, largely in relation to matters of social and economic dislocation. Garbett had probably gone to much greater efforts to avail himself personally of studies of housing quality than many of the bishops of 1965 had to uncover psychological and medical studies of homosexuality. However, what was significant about the developing conduct of the Lords Spiritual in the 1960s was their determination to apply Christian ethical insights to a political discourse in which

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<sup>41</sup> *HL Deb.* 266, c. 133, 12 May 1965.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, cc. 132-5.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, cc. 153-6.

spiritual points of view were increasingly marginal. They used, albeit rather dubiously, the language of the age to suggest their expertise, and there was a conscious effort to ground their interventions in practical experiences of social conditions. Yet they were not simply pandering to contemporary values. The moral view they espoused was not ‘un-Christian’, as such, though nor was it openly tied to any particular denominational tradition. They were seeking to claim a place in the House as a niche professional group, informed about and invested in society as understood by contemporary thought. Social reform required a blend of legal, medical, psychological and sociological expertise; within this dynamic, they brought Christian influence to bear.<sup>44</sup>

This was evident in discussion of the abortion laws. As already noted, the BSR had commissioned a committee chaired by Ian Ramsey in response to the introduction of a Private Member’s bill in 1961. However, by the time this report had emerged in 1965 and been approved by the Church Assembly, legislation to liberalise abortion law had already begun progressing through the House of Lords. This was a debate, even more so than that on homosexuality, which had been defined by medical insights. Over the course of decades, the Abortion Law Reform Association (ALRA) had sought to ‘medicalise’ the issue, diminishing the role of the ‘community’ in dictating women’s health. Feminist claims attracted little attention, but a broad scientific argument could be made for medical practitioners to have the freedom to lessen preventable human suffering and improve the nation’s health. In alliance with the British Medical Association, the ALRA members were successful

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<sup>44</sup> *Problem of homosexuality*, p.5. See also Ramsey’s comments, *HL Deb.* 266, 12 May 1965, c. 83.

in dictating the framework of debate, promoting a number of bills into parliament in the 1960s.<sup>45</sup>

The bill introduced by Labour peer Lewis Silkin in 1965 was of particular significance in terms of the Lords Spiritual's developing role as 'ethicists'; it largely reflected the findings of the BSR report. It sought to clarify the existing law in cases where a grave risk was posed to the mother's health or life, and provide access to termination facilities when pregnancies resulted from sexual offences, or when it could be established the child would be severely disabled. It also provided for abortion where an assessment of the mother's social conditions determined that she was unsuitable to assume responsibility for the child.

Although medical interests had determined the nature of the debate, it was telling that Silkin's bill sought to appeal to the BSR report. Though the influence of the churches in society was diminishing, by associating the bill with the findings of a committee of churchmen and 'secular' experts, the staunch opposition to reform mounted by the Roman Catholic hierarchy might be undermined.<sup>46</sup> However, in an important philosophical sense, the bill departed from the BSR report. Silkin's bill treated matters like the risk of the deformity of the foetus and the mother's familial and social situation as objective facts in their own right. The BSR report considered these only in relation to their effect on the mother.

The distinction was subtle, but significant. In the BSR's formulation, doctors were being asked to make a medical determination based on their knowledge of the mother's health; in Silkin's, they were being asked to undertake an abortion based on

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<sup>45</sup> Barbara Brookes, *Abortion in England 1900-1967* (London, 1988), esp. pp. 144-53; Keith Hindell and Madeleine Simms, *Abortion law reformed* (London, 1971), esp. ch. 5; David Paintin, *Abortion law reform in Britain 1964-2003: a personal account*, British Pregnancy Advisory Service (Stratford-upon-Avon, 2015), pp. 8-24.

<sup>46</sup> Hindell and Simms, *Abortion law*, pp. 93-4.



non-medical indicators. The BSR recommendations began from the point of the mother's rights and the known effects of the pregnancy on her, while Silkin moved beyond the mother to include other forms of social evaluation and the appraisal of statistical uncertainties.

The existing statement of the Church's position, from the Lambeth Conference Report of 1958, condemned abortion 'in the strongest terms'.<sup>47</sup> Nevertheless, Beloe and Ramsey sought to organise support for the BSR report on the parliamentary bishops' bench. Ramsey certainly regarded the existing law as poor, undermining women's health, fuelling an industry of backstreet abortionists, and exposing medical practitioners to legal risk. Though the issue remained deeply troublesome, from Ramsey's perspective the BSR report struck a good philosophical and practical compromise.<sup>48</sup> As early as November 1965, before the bill's second reading, Ramsey had circulated the draft report to leading peers. Though he emphasised that it in no way bound the Church of England or the Church Assembly to its conclusions, it was impossible to avoid the inference that he himself approved of it.<sup>49</sup>

The influence of the BSR report on the approach of the bishops' bench to the issue was crucial. The BSR, it is true, did not seek actively to influence the work of the parliamentary bishops. However, the facilities they provided undoubtedly had a significant effect on the Lords Spiritual's conduct. The House now required its speakers, particularly after the passage of the Life Peerages Act in 1958, to be demonstrably expert on any given topic. There were those among the bishops, such

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<sup>47</sup> Lambeth Conference, *Report of proceedings* 1958, 2 (London, 1958), p. 148.

<sup>48</sup> Owen Chadwick, *Michael Ramsey: a life* (Oxford, 1990), pp. 154-5.

<sup>49</sup> Ramsey circular to Lord Chancellor, Amulree, Brain, Carrington, Dillthorne, Longford, Silkin, Lord Chief Justice, Cohen, Denning, Taylor, and Waddington, 15 Nov. 1965, RP 70/186-8; Beloe circular to Summerskill and Iddesleigh, 19 Nov. 1965, RP 70/195-6.

as Stockwood, who on occasion shied away from contributing to the debates because they lacked the time to master a subject fully.<sup>50</sup> The reports of the BSR provided a readily available means of quickly coming to terms with the nature of, and influences on, debate. It was notable that the day before Ramsey met with bishops to discuss their approach in the House, Beloe received a version of Silkin's bill as amended by Gordon Dunstan, who had been largely responsible for drafting the BSR report, which brought it into line with those recommendations.<sup>51</sup>

Ecclesiastical leaders' desire for the Lords Spiritual to engage with social questions in terms which resonated with the 'secular society' undermined their ability to provide a lead to the other Christian elements in the House. The leading Labour and Roman Catholic peer, Lord Longford, wrote to Beloe announcing the intention of Roman Catholic peers to table an amendment delaying the second reading for six months, effectively moving for the rejection of the bill. He assured Beloe they had no wish 'to take the lead from a religious point of view', preferring to 'come in behind the Church of England', as they had behind the Anglican peers in 1963 to defeat 'breakdown'.

However, rumours had been circulated by Silkin himself that the bishops were likely to support his bill. Beloe refused to confirm one way or the other, noting only that Ramsey was returning from a foreign trip and would consider the position with the bishops on his return.<sup>52</sup> In the event, four Lords Spiritual voted against the amendment of Catholic peers to delay the second reading, and it failed to pass.

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<sup>50</sup> MCE memo, 20 Nov. 1965, RP 70/200; Southwark to Beloe, 20 Nov. 1965, RP 70/210.

<sup>51</sup> Dunstan to Beloe, 16 Nov. 1965, RP 70/189; amended bill, 29 Nov 1965, RP 70/227.

<sup>52</sup> Beloe to 'Bishops concerned' (meaning the Archbishop of York, and bishops of Exeter, St. Albans, Southwark, and Worcester), 26 Nov. 1965, RP 70/222.

Stockwood made it clear to the peers that he, and by implication the Anglican bishops, would ‘have nothing whatever to do’ with the amendment.<sup>53</sup>

The overtly doctrinal opposition mounted by the Catholics in parliament enabled the bill’s proponents further to tie the existing law to outmoded religious bigotry. To Baroness Summerskill, opponents of reform would respond little to rational argument, given that their argument was derived from a place of ‘convention and prejudice and ... theological doctrine’.<sup>54</sup> She spoke with the authority, not only as perhaps the only mother in attendance, but as a medical doctor. It was with technical expertise such as this that the bishops sought to associate themselves. From as early as December 1965, Beloe attempted to establish areas of common interest between the Church and the medical and legal elements in the House, as led by the distinguished neurologist Baron Brain and the former Lord Chancellor Viscount Dilhorne.<sup>55</sup> Ramsey sent Brain a copy of the BSR draft report, later revealing that he preferred the principles embodied by the report over Silkin’s bill.<sup>56</sup> Beloe was keen for the conduct of the bishops in the House to suggest that the medical community and the leaders of the established Church were pulling in essentially the same direction. When it became apparent that Brain and the British Medical Association favoured the establishment of a departmental committee to consider the existing bill, it was Beloe who took the suggestion to Silkin. Three days later at the bill’s second reading, Mortimer and Stockwood both advocated a government inquiry.<sup>57</sup> Though

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<sup>53</sup> The amendment lost by 8 to 70. The Archbishop of Canterbury and the bishops of Exeter, Southwark, and Worcester voted with the majority. *HL Deb.* 270, cc. 1159, 1239, 30 Nov. 1965. For other denominations’ views on the issue, see Machin, *Churches and social issues*, pp. 200-1; Machin, ‘British churches and moral change’ pp. 237-8.

<sup>54</sup> *HL Deb.* 270, c. 1189, 30 Nov. 1965.

<sup>55</sup> Beloe to Cunningham, 22 Dec. 1965, RP 70/241.

<sup>56</sup> Ramsey to Brain, 15 Nov. 1965, RP 70/186; Beloe memo, 25 Nov. 1965, RP 70/220.

<sup>57</sup> Beloe memo, 26 Nov. 1965, RP 70/221; Beloe to ‘bishops concerned’, 29 Nov. 1965, RP 70/228-9; *HL Deb.* 270, cc. 1162, 1233, 30 Nov. 1965.

Silkin refused to concede, the Lords Spiritual and the legal and medical expertise in the House continued to find common ground.<sup>58</sup>

Although they tried, and failed, to reconcile their differences with the leading campaign group, the ALRA, the Lords Spiritual were clearly repositioning themselves within the discourse of the House.<sup>59</sup> They were emphatically not the *de facto* leaders of the churches' moral rearguard to moral change, but the proponents of a Christian ethical view, informed of and thoughtful about contemporary social circumstances. Beloe noted in his briefs that his recommendations for the lines the Lords Spiritual should adopt were derived from the 'general feeling' among the bishops.<sup>60</sup> Yet it was clear that ecclesiastical authorities desired the bishops to act in parliament along the lines set out in the BSR report.

Beloe organised an effective campaign to amend the bill to this end. He maintained close contact with Dunstan and Mortimer, seeking advice that he might relay to the bishops.<sup>61</sup> Dunstan recommended that the bishops support Silkin's bill at its second reading, with a view to introducing substantial amendments in Committee to ensure that the preconditions for permitting an abortion be only those which related to the mother alone.<sup>62</sup> In the House, Mortimer attempted to delete paragraphs which provided for an abortion on the grounds of 'the other interests of the child', rather than exclusively on those of the danger to the mother's life or health.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> See, for example, Beloe to Brain, 31 Dec. 1965, RP 91/109; Ramsey to Dilhorne, 14 Jan. 1966, RP 91/139.

<sup>59</sup> Dunstan to Beloe, 21 Dec. 1965, RP 91/81-2.

<sup>60</sup> Beloe to bishops of Leicester, Oxford, Bristol, and St. Albans, 25 Feb. 1966, RP 91/179.

<sup>61</sup> See for example, Beloe to Dunstan, 17 Nov. 1965, RP 70/191; MCE memo, 20 Nov. 1965, RP 70/201; Beloe to Dunstan, 24 Jan. 1966, RP 91/148; Dunstan's notes on amendments, 25 Jan. 1966, RP 91/152-4.

<sup>62</sup> Dunstan briefing, 22 Nov. 1965, RP 70/211-13. See also, Silkin bill as amended by Dunstan, 29 Nov. 1965, RP 70/227.

<sup>63</sup> *HL Deb.* 272, 1 Feb. 1966, cc. 320-3.

Though he was unsuccessful on that occasion, the bench made a strong showing to remove the clause which most jarred with the principles of the BSR report.<sup>64</sup> This would have provided for abortion if ‘the pregnant woman is or will be physically or mentally inadequate to be the mother of a child or of another child’. Ramsey felt the clause so bad ‘as probably to make the bill not worth while at all’.<sup>65</sup> It entailed, not only a medical judgement, but also

judgments about the woman's moral state, about her social relationships, about her economic position, and about her future moral and spiritual capacity, which is a matter concerning which human powers of prophecy are very limited indeed.<sup>66</sup>

The clause required doctors to make a non-medical assessment of the mother’s capabilities. It was an area of expertise which, if it existed at all, did not belong to the medical profession, but sociologists and social workers, psychologists and, indeed, clerics. The bishops were concerned to let doctors make decisions, consistent with the demands of a Christian conscience, within the bounds of their professional competency, and no more. Six Lords Spiritual voted successfully for the clause’s removal, with Mortimer of Exeter acting as a Teller.<sup>67</sup> It was not a victory they had wrought on their own. Beloe wrote to the bishops, noting that their efforts in the House had succeeded through their close co-operation with Brain and Dilhorne, and the sociologist Baroness Wootton.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> Beloe to bishops of London, Norwich, and Oxford, 18-23 Feb. 1966, RP 91/174-6.

<sup>65</sup> Ramsey to Dilhorne, 10 Feb. 1966, RP 91/168.

<sup>66</sup> *HL Deb.* 273, c. 108, 22 Feb. 1966.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, c. 151. Archbishop of Canterbury, and bishops of Exeter, Lincoln, London, Norwich, and Winchester voted for the removal of the clause. There had been at least one meeting of the bishops under Ramsey to discuss this vote. Telephone message to Dilhorne’s secretary, 15 Feb. 1966, RP 91/171. A previous attempt had been made to remove the clause in Committee. *HL Deb.* 272, 3 Feb. 1966, c. 527.

<sup>68</sup> Beloe to the bishops of Bristol, Leicester, Oxford, and St. Albans, 25 Feb. 1966, RP 91/179; Dilhorne to Ramsey, 8 Feb. 1966, RP 91/167; Ramsey to Dilhorne, 10 Feb. 1966, RP 91/168; Dilhorne to Beloe, 23 Feb. 1966, RP 91/177.

Church leaders had succeeded in making the legislation better conform to the Christian principles embodied in the BSR report. Yet there were limitations to Ramsey's and Beloe's ability to orchestrate the bishops' bench. On the less fundamental tenets of the BSR report it was difficult to overcome the variety of positions on the bench. Clauses remained in the bill which provided for abortion on grounds of the likelihood of foetal deformity, and for pregnancies resulting from sexual offences. Though these ran counter to the principles in the BSR report, they were not quite so open-ended as the more objectionable clauses. Agreement between the bishops on their approach could not be reached. Though Ramsey opposed both, Stockwood favoured both. Williams of Leicester meanwhile, supported the latter clause but not the former.

Given that the bill could not possibly pass into law during the session, Ramsey decided not to press the issue. The bill as amended, at the very least, set a decent precedent for a future parliament. As Ramsey was unable to attend the third reading himself owing to a commitment to lecture at Coventry cathedral, Beloe set out his view to Fleming of Norwich.<sup>69</sup> In a brief speech in the House, Fleming emphasised how keenly the bishops, as many others, had desired reform. Still, he noted the reservations which had been expressed about those clauses which did not chime with the BSR report. Casting the Church in constructive light, he welcomed the news that Silkin intended to introduce another bill in the next parliament.<sup>70</sup>

As during the debates on marriage reform in 1963, Ramsey and Beloe sought to avoid an impression that the bishops exerted a decisive influence on the debate. He suggested, for example, that it would be better if the removal of the 'inadequacy'

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<sup>69</sup> Beloe to Norwich, 4 Mar. 1966, RP 91/181-2.

<sup>70</sup> *HL Deb.* 273, cc. 943-4, 7 Mar. 1966.

clause be instigated by a lay peer, rather than a bishop.<sup>71</sup> However, unlike in 1963, Ramsey's hesitancy was folded into a broader, constructive strategy. The Lords Spiritual sought a place within the 'technical' dialogue of the House, desiring not to impose a Christian view so much as exert a legitimate Christian influence, within the terms of the debate, alongside and complementary to other recognised areas of expertise. In this way, not only had they exercised considerable influence over the development of social policy, but had been welcomed in doing so by a socially progressive Labour government. When a new bill emerged in April 1967, it much more closely corresponded to the BSR report than its predecessor – using, for example, the BSR's preferred language in taking into account the mother's 'total environment'. Nevertheless, the parliamentary bishops remained vigilant, and as strongly organised as before. In some ways, Beloe's organisation of the bench became even more direct – he urged the Bishop of Wakefield to attend the debates to act as 'voting fodder', despite the bishop's ill health and confessed lack of understanding of the subject.<sup>72</sup>

The effectiveness of the bishops' approach to influencing social policy necessarily attracted the attention of would-be reformers. Church leaders' anxiety to adapt to the contemporary political discourse had increased their rhetorical influence in the debate, and thereby their political significance. This did not escape those with a mind to strengthen the case for 'progressive' social reform; they sought to marshal the bishops to their causes. Where such influences grew, the role of the Lords Spiritual – the Archbishop of Canterbury in particular – tended to become fraught. Unwilling to jeopardise their hard-earned influence in the House through concerted

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<sup>71</sup> Telephone message to Dilhorne's secretary, 15 Feb. 1966, RP 91/171.

<sup>72</sup> Wakefield to Beloe, 16 Jul. 1967, RP 110/85; Beloe to Wakefield, 18 Jul. 1967, RP 110/90.

opposition, but equally unwilling to undermine basic Christian principles, the bishops' engagement in the House could become less coherent and so less effective.

This was certainly the case when the question of the divorce laws returned to the House. The bishops' defeat of Abse's divorce bill in 1963 had produced much anger, with Abse himself later blaming 'a secret all-party cabal of church and chapel' which had conspired to kill the bill.<sup>73</sup> Recognising that some measure of reform was inevitable, and having received the advice of the Home Secretary and Lord Chancellor, Ramsey had convened a group to investigate, 'sociologically as well as doctrinally', whether there could be

a principle at law of breakdown of marriage which was free from any trace of the idea of consent, which conserved the point that offences and not only wishes are the basis of the breakdown, and which was protected by a far more thorough insistence on reconciliation procedure first.<sup>74</sup>

For their part, Ramsey and Beloe sought to counter the perception that the Church was socially remote – perhaps even socially redundant – while maintaining Christian influence on social policy. However, the composition of the group was the result of a back-and-forth between Beloe, officers of the BSR, and the Conservative government. As Stephen Cretney has noted, the selection process was similar to that for government commissions, preserving seats for representatives of particular professions and interests.<sup>75</sup> The government's interest was to ensure that the committee produced a statement in favour of reform which would help settle their political problem of having both to appear 'progressive' and 'modern', while not alienating their traditional base.<sup>76</sup> On these grounds the government sought to

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<sup>73</sup> Leo Abse, *Private member* (London, 1973), p. 163.

<sup>74</sup> *HL Deb.* 250, c. 1547, 21 Jun. 1963. See also, Beloe memo, 21 May 1963, RP 43/5-6.

<sup>75</sup> Cretney, *Law, law reform, family*, p. 50.

<sup>76</sup> Beloe memo, 7 Sept. 1963, RP 43/24.



prevent various appointments suggested by Beloe and the BSR which might broaden the religious perspectives on the committee.<sup>77</sup>

The group which emerged under Mortimer reported after almost two years of work. *Putting Asunder*, published in July 1966, concerned itself not with the Church's own doctrine of marriage, but with how it should be interpreted and applied to contemporary circumstances.<sup>78</sup> The report vehemently opposed the notion of 'divorce by consent' and the implication that marriage was a private contract, rather than a social institution. However, it acknowledged that the principle of 'breakdown' accorded 'better with social realities', showing divorce for what is was, 'a defeat for both', far better than the matrimonial offence.<sup>79</sup> Reconciling this with the imperative to preserve marriage as a 'lifelong' institution, it was essential that a court should determine whether a marriage had actually broken down. This system should supplant the existing process; to saddle 'breakdown' alongside the existing matrimonial offences would ground the law in two incompatible principles.

The archbishop's group had arrived at a resolution that would have broadly served both Ramsey's and the 1963 Conservative government's agenda.<sup>80</sup> However, in the intervening period, a Labour government, less sympathetic to the Church's concerns and more determined to pass reform, had been formed. The legislation which eventually emerged was the result of an apparent compromise between the archbishop's group and the newly established Law Commission. In response to the archbishop's group, the Commission published its own report, *The Field of Choice*,

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<sup>77</sup> Cretney, *Law, law reform, family*, pp. 49-50; Lewis and Wallis, 'Fault', pp. 320-2. Full list of member s reproduced in B.H. Lee, *Divorce law reform in England* (London, 1974), p. 44.

<sup>78</sup> See comments in Lee, *Divorce law*, pp. 44-7.

<sup>79</sup> *Putting asunder: a divorce law for contemporary society. The report of a group appointed by the Archbishop of Canterbury in January 1964* (London, 1966), p. 18.

<sup>80</sup> For the reaction in the press to *Putting Asunder*, see Lee, *Divorce law*, pp. 48-9.

which rejected *Putting Asunder*'s proposal for court adjudication of 'breakdown' on practical grounds. Instead, it proposed 'breakdown without inquest'; the court would simply assume breakdown on receiving evidence of a period of separation.

The Law Commission's claim that their proposals would 'give effect to the underlying principles' of *Putting Asunder* was misleading. Though nominally impartial on the issue, it was clear the Law Commission desired reform along the lines of *Field of Choice*, and sought to associate their proposals with those of the BSR, to claim Christian support for their legal arguments.<sup>81</sup> The conflation of the two reports gathered apace following a debate in the House of Lords on the various proposals in November 1966. Agreement was reached for the Law Commission and Church to enter into a dialogue to find ways that the differences between the reports could be reconciled. Representing *Putting Asunder* was Mortimer, who like Dunstan and Ian Ramsey, believed the study of ethics began from a philosophical, rather than doctrinal or scriptural, basis. He confessed himself 'quite convinced' that the distinction between divorce with or without a court inquest was 'not so very wide'.<sup>82</sup> Unsurprisingly, both sides agreed there was 'no difference in principle' between them. They recommended that breakdown be the sole ground of divorce, without the need for an inquest. Rather, breakdown would be inferred from proof of separation for a period of time, or evidence of traditional matrimonial offence.<sup>83</sup>

The compromise threw Beloe and Ramsey's plans for the Church's influence in parliament into disarray. The principles which had been arrived at were avowedly not those of *Putting Asunder*, yet, when a bill emerged along the lines of the compromise, it was assumed – not unnaturally – that it had received Christian ethical

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<sup>81</sup> Cretney, *Law, law reform, family*, pp. 59-63; Lewis and Wallis, 'Fault', pp. 325-6.

<sup>82</sup> *HL Deb.* 278, c. 347, 23 Nov. 1966.

<sup>83</sup> Cretney, *Law, law reform, family*, pp. 64-6.

sanction. *The Daily Mirror*, for example, reported that ‘the peace-making Archbishop’ had been converted into an ally of the divorce campaigners.<sup>84</sup> Ramsey was by no means supportive. He consistently distanced himself from Mortimer’s compromise position, refusing to endorse it in public forums. According to Beloe, Ramsey sought to remain free ‘to criticise and seek for amendment’ of any resulting bill.<sup>85</sup> ‘The only alteration of the law which I might favour’, he commented to Lord Balfour, was ‘reconstruction of the law on the lines of the recent report entitled “Putting Asunder”’.<sup>86</sup>

Yet Ramsey could not openly oppose the proposals without risking the public perception that the Church’s leaders had abandoned the ‘rational’ position which had been arrived at. Indeed, when his opposition became public, he was accused of a ‘sad breach of faith’ by Abse.<sup>87</sup> Ramsey’s adherence to *Putting Asunder* had forced him into a position of opposition to the apparent social need, and to legal, sociological, and even apparently Christian expertise. The undermining of the archbishop’s hard fought influence on social issues was made clear when his criticisms of the bill in *The Sunday Times* were answered the following week by a legal expert.<sup>88</sup>

The government – indeed, the bishops themselves – expected Ramsey to give a lead to the bench. However, it was clear that he was not entirely certain what this lead should be: to remain true to the Christian insights of *Putting Asunder*, or preserve the Church’s apparently progressive place in social discourse. His situation was complicated further still by the high-profile stand taken by Mortimer. He had appeared before a House of Commons all-party committee to affirm his support for

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<sup>84</sup> Quoted in *Ibid*, p. 67.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid*. See also, Ramsey to Exeter, 22 May 1967, RP 117/322-7.

<sup>86</sup> Ramsey to Balfour, 24 Aug. 1966, RP 102/266.

<sup>87</sup> *Daily Telegraph*, 19 Jan. 1968.

<sup>88</sup> *Sunday Times*, 11 Feb. 1968, 18 Feb. 1968.

the bill's principles in February 1968, an intervention which proponents of the reform suggested had 'repaired the damage' done to the bill by Ramsey's opposition.<sup>89</sup>

Ramsey organised a meeting of the Lords Spiritual in June 1967, and the subject was raised again at the Bishops' Meeting in June 1969. He sought to determine if some consistent episcopal opinion could be divined. He did not, he emphasised, expect all bishops to come to the same conclusion, though he was 'looking for a fair norm of episcopal opinion' as a guide.<sup>90</sup> It proved elusive. At the vote on the second reading in the Lords, the bench divided. Ramsey abstained, three bishops voted against, and five in favour. Mortimer even acted as a Teller for the supporters of the bill.<sup>91</sup> *The Daily Telegraph* reported on the bishops' differences, noting that as legislators they faced 'the delicate task of helping to regulate the conduct of a community which largely rejects their principles'.<sup>92</sup>

The newspaper's prognosis of the Lords Spiritual's social irrelevance belied the fact that they had actually adapted rather successfully to the changing political discourse on social issues. The participation of the Anglican bishops was in fact essential to the reassertion of the constitutional role and political utility of the upper parliamentary chamber. The Lords Spiritual succeeded in claiming a role in the House's 'balance of expertise', bringing to bear a unique, socially relevant, and politically useful influence on debate.

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<sup>89</sup> *Daily Mirror*, 2 Feb. 1968; *Daily Telegraph*, 2 Feb. 1968.

<sup>90</sup> Ramsey circular to all Lords Spiritual, 11 Jun. 1968, RP 138/261; list of attending Lords Spiritual, 25 Jun. 1968, RP 138/262; Bishops' Meeting, 17-20 Jun. 1969, BM 16/156-8.

<sup>91</sup> *HL Deb.* 303, c. 441, 30 Jun. 1969. The second reading was passed by 122 to 34. The Archbishop of Canterbury abstained; the bishops of Blackburn, Chichester and Leicester voted against; the bishops of Chester, Coventry, Exeter, London, and Southwark voted in favour.

<sup>92</sup> *Daily Telegraph*, 2 Jul. 1969.

It was an achievement which, as the experience of 1969 had shown, was wrought at a price. The Church had been manoeuvred into such a position that, though the bill undermined the Christian principle of lifelong marriage by introducing partial no-fault divorce, several bishops had voted in favour, while Ramsey found himself, despite his deep misgivings, unable to oppose. Influence over social policy came at a price; it proved, on occasion, a bitter pill to swallow.

It also necessitated the development of a centralised ‘bureaucracy’, of sorts, approximating to a party-political structure. That is not to suggest that Beloe or Ramsey acted as ‘whips’ as such. There certainly seemed to be no repercussions for bishops breaking away from the ‘party line’. However, there was a recognition among the bishops not only that it was essential that spiritual ideas should hold sway in parliament, but that this necessitated a certain mode of engagement.

The bishops did not intervene in the House to represent the established Church of England, nor did they speak directly for the other Christian churches of the United Kingdom. They did not even speak much on the basis of their own individual personal Christian insights; the bench acted increasingly as a unit. Rather, they sought to impart an essentially ‘Christian’ means of approaching ethical questions; they offered the ‘secular society’ a process, less than a prescription.

The conduct of the Lords Spiritual suggested that the importance of the religious establishment had come to rest less in the Church’s role in the practical functioning of the state – in, for example, the provision of social welfare services by ecclesiastical organisations. Rather, its value lay in the opportunities it provided for engaging *with* the state. The Lords Spiritual essentially assumed a role as the advocates for the religious interests and perspectives in civic society. It was a

function which became acutely important for the Church as acceptance of the 'secular society' spread.

## Conclusion. Bishops in parliament

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The revival of discussions on the reform of the House of Lords in 1967 provided an opportunity for leading members of both the Church and the state to reflect on the role of the parliamentary bishops. As in the 1950s, these discussions on Lords reform had been prompted by the nation's relatively lacklustre economic performance; the structures of government required extensive 'modernisation' if the nation was to reverse its trajectory. To reformers like Richard Crossman, Lord President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons, inefficient and anachronistic parliamentary processes and formalities needed to be swept away, and the upper chamber's 'irrational' composition reconsidered, if parliament was to effectively scrutinise the work of the executive.<sup>1</sup>

There could be few more obvious 'irrationalities' than the presence of twenty-six Anglican bishops, dressed in clerical robes, occupying a place of prominence in a parliament which presided over a 'secular society'. Yet the presence of the parliamentary bishops was not even a minor issue in the reform discussions. Reformers, it is true, were hesitant to pile '*odium theologicum*' on to an already finicky constitutional debate.<sup>2</sup> However, their reluctance was suggestive of much more; the interventions of the Lords Spiritual had come to be highly valued by the peers, by the government, and by various scientific and professional interest groups. In contrast to the 1920s, the Lords Spiritual's absence in debates on constitutional

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<sup>1</sup> Peter Dorey, '1949, 1969, 1999: the Labour Party and House of Lords reform', *Parliamentary affairs* 59 (2006), pp. 604-5; Peter Dorey and Alexander Kelso, *House of Lords reform since 1911: must the Lords go?* (Basingstoke, 2011), p. 138. For broader context of 'modernisation', see Peter Dorey and Victoria Honeyman, 'Ahead of his time: Richard Crossman and House of Commons reform in the 1960s', *British politics* 5 (2010), pp. 149-78.

<sup>2</sup> Wheeler-Booth to Beloe, 26 Feb. 1968, RP 134/61.

reform was not a reflection of their incidental political significance, but of their political and parliamentary value.

Although the cross-party committee called to formulate reform proposals did not envisage that the Lords Spiritual would play a significant part in the ‘functional development’ of a reformed House, it did believe that the bishops had an important role in ‘ministry’ and ‘speaking’.<sup>3</sup> Parliamentary debate, it was claimed, had benefited from the bishops’ political independence and thoughtful engagement with contemporary social issues. The Lords Spiritual sought not to overturn, but to influence and inform discussions guided by their ethical convictions.

The committee’s comments on the parliamentary bishops were, it should be noted, heavily informed by the interventions of Robert Beloe, so it is perhaps unsurprising that its estimations of the Lords Spiritual should be so generous. The subcommittee charged with considering the place of the Lords Spiritual took their lead from the papers and evidence that Beloe had provided.<sup>4</sup> Most impressively, he supplied it with a list of every episcopal intervention in House of Lords debates in the ten sessions since 1957, and an analysis which divided the contributions into six categories [see Appendix A]. Such was the committee’s reliance on this information, and the interpretation that Beloe provided, that they reproduced his figures exactly in their submission to the main committee – copying a minor calculation error in the process – and invited Beloe to edit the draft.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> See Beloe’s annotated copy of the inter-party group’s draft report, Wheeler-Booth to Beloe, 16 Feb. 1968, RP 134/43.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Compare the notes Beloe prepared on the representation of religious groups in the House of Lords, the draft report of the inter-party group, and subsequent correspondence. See RP 134, *passim*, esp. Beloe note, 4 Dec. 1967, RP 134/1-21; Beloe note for Ramsey, 15 Jan. 1968, RP 134/29-32; Wheeler-Booth to Beloe, 16 Feb. 1968, RP 134/38-52; Beloe to Wheeler Booth, 19 Feb. 1968, RP 134/53-6; Wheeler-Booth to Beloe, 26 Feb. 1968, RP 134/58-62; Beloe memo, 4 Mar. 1968, RP 134/67-9.



The extent of Beloe's influence with the committee was suggestive, in and of itself, of the authority which was afforded to the views of representatives of the Church. Indeed, the parliamentary debates on reform affirmed that the peers recognised and appreciated the interventions of the bishops in the House. To one Liberal life peer, they were 'the most modern and progressive influence in this House ... the spearhead of reform'.<sup>6</sup> Even the Labour peer, Lord Silkin, who expressed his 'grave doubts' as to the *de facto* representation of religious groups, was forced to concede his reluctance in criticising the Lords Spiritual; they had 'shown themselves very progressive in recent years, and one hesitates to say anything about people who have rendered service'.<sup>7</sup>

The parliamentary consensus was reinforced by the small, but developing, body of literature on the bishops' contemporary parliamentary role. In 1974, John Seagrave emphasised the bishops' role as 'the conscience of everybody' – of the government, the Opposition, and the nation regardless of their religious affiliation. They acted as individuals, refusing to indulge in 'lobby tactics' and speaking from the basis of their personal Christian insight.<sup>8</sup>

Most other commentators publishing in academic journals attempted to shed light on the role of the Lords Spiritual by contrasting their contemporary work with that of their predecessors. In 1953, Garbett argued that the bishops of the nineteenth century might justly be criticised for their close proximity to the secular elite (a somewhat ironic comment, coming from Garbett), their vulnerability to prime

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<sup>6</sup> *HL. Deb.* 281, cc. 1332-3, 12 Apr. 1967.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, c. 1328. Opposition was expressed to the Lords Spiritual at a later debate on the 1968 White Paper on Lords reform, and the subsequent debate on the 1969 Parliament (No. 2) bill by left-wing Labour MPs. See for example the contribution of George Darling, Labour Co-operative MP and self-confessed 'radical in both politics and religion', who believed the effect of the bishops in the House was 'to maintain the authority of the Anglican Church'. *HC Deb.* 777, cc. 73-4, 3 Feb. 1969.

<sup>8</sup> John R. Seagrave, 'A model of organised group behaviour for the Church in British politics', *Parliamentary affairs* 27 (1974), p. 400-3.

ministerial patronage, and their overly eager partisan participation in party-political issues. They had neglected their spiritual and ecclesiastical duties, acting instead as adjuncts to the government and established interests. However, '[i]n recent years', he concluded, 'the bishops have done much to atone for the failures of their predecessors'.<sup>9</sup>

More than a decade later, Drewry and Brock drew essentially the same contrast, colourfully framing it by reference James Hurnard's 1870 poem, 'The setting sun'.

*Have not the Bench of Bishops always voted  
For every cruel, every unjust law,  
Until repentance ceased to be a virtue?*<sup>10</sup>

None of these accounts can be relied upon without significant reservation. They all aimed, with varying degrees of subtlety, to emphasise that spiritual influence was essential to good governance. Such intentions, coupled with the limited scope of the studies, coloured the authors' assessments of the bishops' parliamentary conduct. Yet the nature of the parliamentary and academic debate pointed to the essential paradox of the Lords Spiritual's place in the House. Despite the declining influence of Christianity over social practice and national life, the presence of Anglican bishops in the House of Lords was not simply unquestioned or tolerated; it was welcomed and encouraged.

The explanation for this lay essentially in the shifting nature of the religious establishment. There was declining – and after c. 1920, negligible – political

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<sup>9</sup> Cyril Garbett, 'The Lords Spiritual', *Parliamentary affairs* 7 (1953), pp. 96-101. Herbert Waddams, General Secretary of the Church Assembly Council on Foreign Relations, drew a similar comparison by referencing the controversies stoked by Henson through his opposition to appeasement. H.M. Waddams, 'The attitude of the churches to politics', *Political quarterly* 30 (1959), pp. 33-4

<sup>10</sup> James Hurnard, *The setting sun: a poem in seven books* (London, 1878), p. 277. Quoted in Gavin Drewry and Jenny Brock, 'Prelates in parliament', *Parliamentary affairs* 24 (1970), p. 222.

pressure on the Lords Spiritual to act in any particular way. Rather, the conduct of the parliamentary bishops responded to influences from within the Church itself. It was the demands of the Church's changing mission to 'the nation' which determined the function of the Lords Spiritual.

During Davidson's primacy, it was apparent that the bishops conceived of their role – within the House, but more broadly still – as an 'estate of the realm'. They were the inheritors and guarantors of a national constitutional tradition, one which had secured social and political stability. Only a church which was established, and thereby uninterested in partisan gain, could effectively pursue and propagate justice – political and social – for the whole nation.

The bishops' participation in the House of Lords provided a means by which this influence could be exerted on national discourse and policy. Their place in the balance of interests in the House was unique and essential. Supposedly immune to the commercial, electoral and ideological influences which acted upon party politicians, they claimed the ability to recognise, and to be advocates for, the 'national interest'. They could be expected to intervene in a range of discussions in which the 'national interest' was implicated. It was a role which was manifested most obviously – and indeed, most controversially – in their efforts to defend the existing formulation of Church-state relations from the demands of political nonconformists and the Liberal Party.

Despite the place the bishops claimed for themselves within the existing constitutional order, political pressure constrained and coloured their activities in the House. The established Church, as indeed the wider range of privileged social and economic interests, was confronted by the realities of a plural, increasingly democratic society. On the popular platform, an inductive association could be – and

was – drawn between patrician resistance to democratic advance, and the Lords Spiritual's efforts to defend the constitutional settlement. The parliamentary bishops sought to manage public perception of their role in the House in an effort to disclaim any such association. It was for this purpose that the language of 'national interest' was used. Religious establishment was not a simple facet of broader political and civic injustice, it was essential to the successful conduct of democratic society.

This mode of conduct did not last long into the inter-war period. Church issues moved from the heart of the political debate, as political nonconformity declined and as new political dynamics emerged which drew on class identity and focused on social and industrial issues. In at least one sense, the changed political context increased the significance of the role of the Lords Spiritual – that of the Archbishop of Canterbury in particular. The primate was able authentically to assume a role as the *de facto* voice of British Christian churches; through his offices, the leaders of the churches could exert an influence on the national stage. Yet the primate's role pointed to the essential ambiguity about the Church's relation to the state. Cosmo Lang in particular tried to balance his new role on behalf of the churches with the more traditional role as an essential element of a broader constitutional elite. Lang's confused, uncertain adjudication of these responsibilities at moments of religious and political crisis served to undermine his influence, and indeed that of the Christian churches, in the House.

The most significant influence on the conception of the Church's relation to the institutions of government derived from the advent of a measure of ecclesiastical self-government. It was apparent that with the inception of the Church Assembly in 1919, the bishops came increasingly to conceive of their role in the House in isolation from the political agenda. The Archbishop of Canterbury aside, they acted

less as constitutional statesmen than as ecclesiastical administrators. The bishops' interventions in debate became increasingly rooted in practical Anglican experiences, as the overseers of the Church's social intervention in their dioceses, and most of all as ecclesiastical administrators and governors. For most of the parliamentary bishops, the value of participation in the House was reduced to its direct ecclesiastical function.

Those who remained relatively active in the House largely used it as a forum through which to articulate a competing vision of the relationship between Church and state, and the Church's role in the nation. For Garbett, it provided a means of affirming the continued significance of Christian experiences and perspectives as the state began its expansion into the provision of social services. For Henson and Pollock, in using the House to express their opposition to the direction of ecclesiastical reform, they sought to affirm the Church's national character, to shake their fellow churchmen from the delusion that the advent of the Assembly had relieved them of their responsibilities to the national community.

The bishops' conduct remained largely in this mode until the patterns of social and cultural change forced churchmen to reconsider their place in, and responsibilities to, the nation. By the early 1960s, the argument within the Church that a 'secular society' had emerged, and that churchmen themselves had played a role in bringing it about through their negligence, had become influential. It resulted, ultimately, in the significant reorganisation of structures of ecclesiastical administration to enable central Church bodies and churchmen alike to engage better with the 'social reality'. The Church was to be concerned with society as it was, rather than what churchmen assumed or wished it to be.

In terms of the institutional relationship between Church and state, it meant a re-engagement in the House of Lords. The parliamentary bishops became increasingly active in the House, and their interventions increasingly effective. They came to claim a place in the House not in terms of the constitutional balance of estates, but the chamber's balance of expertise. They sought a role guiding 'secular', industrial society, imbuing it with essential, fundamental Christian values. They championed the inherent value of the individual, and gave their counsel on the Christian principles which had facilitated co-operation and reconciliation between communities.

In their most politically significant interventions on matters of personal moral conduct, they assumed a role as ethicists. They did not necessarily demonstrate any steadfast concern to preserve Christian formulations of social relations. Rather, they sought to influence the national discourse more broadly, providing policy-makers with an essentially Christian means of approaching and understanding ethical issues. They approached the House with the intention of undermining the suggestion that religious influence over the governance of a 'secular' society was inherently irrational. Christian voices were, rather, essential if parliament's technical social and economic business was to be conducted effectively.

The bishops' re-engagement with the House came to be welcomed by peers and the government; they proved themselves to be constructive, progressive, and, in many ways, politically useful. Although they had attained a place of some influence, their activities in the House were still constrained; not by populist opposition to their interventions, but by the expectations of parliamentary debate. Ecclesiastical authorities were clearly of the mind that discursive influence accrued to those who operated constructively within the terms of the national and parliamentary debate.

From the late 1950s, they intervened in – arguably, even orchestrated – the conduct of the bishops’ parliamentary bench to ensure that the Church secured such a position in the House.

It was not that Church leaders simply imbibed and reflected the social thought of the progressive middle and upper classes from which they were drawn, as E.R. Norman has argued.<sup>11</sup> Securing a place of influence in the discourse required the bishops to speak in less specifically denominational, doctrinal, or scriptural terms. That did not mean that they simply jettisoned their existing beliefs, or the view that Christian perspectives were crucial in the conduct of social relations. They used the language of ‘sociology’ – in retrospect, rather unconvincingly – to secure influence in the debate. They assumed a role as the *de facto* voice of Christian civic society, imparting a ‘Christian’ means of approaching ethical issues. The demands made of the parliamentary bishops in their efforts to secure a place of influence in the House of Lords helped to shape the terms in which the broader national leadership by and of the Church was defined and expressed.

Norman would, no doubt, continue to criticise the bishops for trying to make ‘society for the man’, and not ‘the man for society’. However, care must be taken not to acquiesce in the idea that the bishops’ parliamentary conduct suggested that the Church lacked a sense of political purpose beyond the mere attainment of influence. Rather, it was the product of an essentially pragmatic established Church seeking to define and fulfil a ‘national’ role.

As the nation’s religious composition developed in the following decades, the Lords Spiritual’s ‘national’ role became broader still. The bishops came to assume a

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<sup>11</sup> E.R. Norman, *Church and society in England 1770-1970: a historical study* (Oxford, 1976), esp. pp. 1-15.

role as the advocates not just of essentially ‘Christian’ perspectives on social issues, but those of religious people more generally, those of all faiths. This was evident in the archbishops of Canterbury’s and York’s submission to the 2011 Parliamentary Joint Committee on the government’s draft House of Lords reform bill. ‘The Lords Spiritual’, it claimed,

... fulfil an important role in the legislature as an enduring voice for the concerns of people of all faiths, especially at a time of increasingly secularising currents in our public institutions and services.<sup>12</sup>

It was to the broader shifts in the relationship between the Church and state, and in the episcopate’s role in this nexus, that the conduct of the Lords Spiritual responded and, indeed, contributed. Early in the century, the parliamentary bishops had regarded themselves as members of a broader, constitutionally-sanctioned social, economic and political elite. As the institutions of Church and state diverged, the bishops increasingly came to act in terms of their role within the Church, chiefly as ecclesiastical and diocesan administrators. Their concern was not to use the House to relate to the political discourse, which had come to centre on questions of social welfare and industrial relations. Rather, the House became part of a broader ecclesiastical platform from which experiences specific to the Anglican Church, and debates about its role in the nation, could be expressed. As social practices and ethical beliefs continued to depart from traditional Christian standards, the bishops sought a place alongside the representatives of other forms of professional expertise in the House.

Over the course of c.70 years, the parliamentary bishops’ conception of their relation to society and to the state had significantly shifted; while they had conceived

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<sup>12</sup> *A submission from the archbishops of Canterbury and York to the parliamentary joint committee on the government’s draft bill and White Paper*, General Synod misc. paper 1004 (Oct. 2011), p. 7.



of themselves as essentially a part of the state, seeking to relate to society, they had come to assume a role as an important component of civic society, seeking to influence the state.

On a broader level, of course, this all pointed to the changing nature of the religious establishment. It was telling that the most significant influences on the parliamentary conduct of the bishops were not political, but ecclesiastical. Intellectual and organisational developments within the Church determined the bishops' parliamentary conduct. Despite the fact that for most of the period, particularly after c. 1920, there was no politically significant or direct challenge to the religious establishment, the function of the Lords Spiritual responded to the ecclesiastical authorities' perception of the Church's failure, of its declining place in national life, its dislocation from society, and the failure of its spiritual mission.

The role of the Lords Spiritual was clearly of far greater ecclesiastical than political significance. Yet in seeking influence in parliament, the bishops necessarily had to couch their interventions in terms which would resonate with the parliamentary discourse. Under Davidson, they used the language of 'national interest' to suggest that religious establishment did not simply equate to patrician privilege, but ensured that the constitutional system worked in the interest of the whole nation. The compromises this necessity entailed became greater and greater as the identities of Church and state diverged and as public social practices departed from traditional Christian standards.

By the early 1960s, Church leaders were clearly extremely concerned for the bishops to secure a place of influence in parliamentary debate. They were not seeking to *defend* the Church's place in the national discourse, as the bishops had under Davidson, but rather to *claim* one. While Christian thought may have been

influential in establishing the parameters of the debate on permissiveness, in parliament the Lords Spiritual had to appeal to the nature of the debate. It amounted to a form of lexical secularisation, the bishops' couching their interventions in less specifically religious terms in an effort to ensure that Christian views continued to influence debate.

There are several ways in which a study of the parliamentary bishops might have been conducted. It is possible, for example, to imagine a 'cultural' history of the Lords Spiritual, complementary to Callum Brown's work, which examined the changing patterns of engagement with, and political significance of, 'civil religion'. Alternatively, a tighter focus on the bishops' social interventions in the House would have revealed a great deal about currents of ecclesiastical thought, and their influence on social policy. This thesis has approached the Lords Spiritual as an institution in their own right. It has considered the bishops' changing conduct and function in the House of Lords over a significant period of time, and placed it in the broader social, political, and ecclesiastical context. Such an approach has had the advantage of generating insights which appeal to a number of areas of study – not least, to the large body of work on secularisation, and, more broadly, that on the changing nature of the religious establishment. This study has also intersected with questions of the reciprocal influence of political and religious thought over the twentieth century, British constitutionalism and the role of the House of Lords, and the Church's role in imperial governance and decolonisation, among other things.

If a focus on the role of the Church in the institutions of government attests to anything, it is that, despite the great social and cultural upheavals of the century, the Church proved highly adaptive. When sufficiently driven by churchmen's fear of

their own irrelevance, the religious establishment continued – and indeed, continues – to exert a significant influence in national life.

## Appendix A

Reproduction of Robert Beloe's categorisation of episcopal contributions to House of Lords debates, 1957-1967.<sup>1</sup>

Parliamentary session	Category						Total
	The Church	A bishops' locality	Social affairs	Overseas affairs	Internal affairs	Tributes to individuals	
	1957/8	0	0	9	2	0	11
	1958/9	1	1	20	6	0	28
	1959/60	1	1	17	7	2	30
	1960/1	5	0	11	8	6	30
	1961/2	1	1	13	8	8	32
	1962/3	8	1	21	6	12	49
	1963/4	6	3	26	9	9	55
	1964/5	3	1	49	3	9	68
	1965/6	1	1	24	10	14	50
	1966/6	4	4	41	9	10	69
	Total	30	13	228 <sup>2</sup>	68	70	422

<sup>1</sup> Beloe note, 4 Dec. 1967, RP 134/1.

<sup>2</sup> Beloe's calculation error is reproduced here. The actual total of contributions to 'Social affairs' was, according to Beloe's categorisation, 231.

## Appendix B

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Reproduction of Gavin Drewry's and Jenny Brock's categorisation of episcopal contributions to House of Lords debates, 1960-1969.<sup>1</sup>

	No. 'Items' <sup>2</sup> 1960-69
Church matters <sup>3</sup>	47
Industrial, commercial and economic affairs	35
Education and Youth	31
International problems <sup>4</sup>	27
Social welfare and medical services	25
Penal reform and crime rate and law enforcement	25
African affairs	22
Environment and planning	20
Miscellaneous	20
Immigration and race relations in Britain	17
Drink, drugs and gambling	16
Mass media, censorship and the arts	16
Transport and road safety	16
Matrimonial law and family matters	15
Defence <sup>5</sup>	15
Reform of governmental institutions	13
Personal tributes	13
Leisure and recreation <sup>6</sup>	11
Housing and land	9
Science and technology	7
Other Commonwealth [Empire] Affairs	7
Homosexuality and prostitution	6
Animal welfare	6
Abortion and euthanasia	4
Agriculture	4
The legal system and the trial process	3

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<sup>1</sup> Gavin Drewry and Jenny Brock, 'Prelates in parliament', *Parliamentary affairs* 24 (1970), p. 236.

<sup>2</sup> Multiple contributions to a bill by one bishops are counted as a single 'Item'.

<sup>3</sup> Including debates on Church property.

<sup>4</sup> Including poverty, population, refugees, overseas aid, ideology, and the UN.

<sup>5</sup> Including NATO, civil defence and disarmament.

<sup>6</sup> Including Sabbath observance.

## Appendix C

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Classifications used by the present study to categorise episcopal contributions to House of Lords debates, 1903-1974.

Theme	Sub-theme 1	Sub-theme 2
<b>Arts, culture, and heritage</b>	The arts	
	Heritage	
	Leisure and sport	
<b>Church matters</b>	Church bills	
	Church measures	
	Ecumenism	
	The religious establishment	
	Misc.	
<b>The Citizen</b>	Electoral and franchise reform	
	Freedom of speech, broadcast, and publication	
	Local government and democracy	
	Parliamentary and other constitutional reform	
<b>Crime, offenders, and prisons</b>	Prisons and offenders	
	Crime	
	Civil disorder	
	Justice	Legal support
		Justices, juries, and magistrates
	Police forces	

	Sin and criminal law	Corporal punishment
		Euthanasia
		Homosexuality
		Prostitution
		Suicide
		Termination of pregnancy
<b>Education</b>	Education (primary and secondary)	
	Education (higher, further, and adult)	
	Youth instruction	
<b>The economy</b>	Agriculture	
	Business and employment practices	
	Charities and voluntary organisations	
	Housing, land, and planning	
	Industrial, commercial, and economic affairs	
	Public infrastructure	
	Trade disputes and trade unions	
	(Un)employment	
<b>The 'moral' economy</b>	Betting, gambling, and lotteries	
	Licensing and temperance	
	Sunday opening	
<b>The natural world</b>	Animal welfare	
	The environment	

<b>Foreign affairs</b>	Commonwealth (and imperial) affairs	
	Defence and armed forces	
	Domestic wartime arrangements	
	Foreign relations and incidents	
	International development and aid	
<b>Government</b>	Administration of the House	
	Taxation, spending, and Government finance	
	Queen's/King's Speech	
<b>Matrimonial and family matters</b>	Divorce	
	Other family matters	
	Other matrimonial law	
<b>Social services and welfare provision</b>	Benefits and entitlements	
	Medical provision	
	Pensions and retirement	
	Poverty	
	Social services	



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Cabinet Office records	The National Archives
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